

“In every age, a society is controlled by one or another force which dominates people’s lives. For example, church doctrine may determine the paths of politics, economics and science, or economic conditions may drive political and religious thinking. Historically, theatre has helped society understand the world by encompassing large issues through metaphoric communication and providing a communal experience, which relates individuals to the group and the group to the forces controlling society. No matter the place, the time, the reason or extent of change, a fundamental question underlies the theatre’s work (and every serious enterprise): What does it mean to be a human being?”

Beeb Salzer
San Diego University

Exploring the question “what does it mean to be a human being” as acting students means more than researching, interviewing and thinking. It also means more than memorizing lines, gnashing of teeth and “putting on a show” or characters. It means involving our entire instrument honestly - our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self.

“For a would be actor, the prerequisite is talent. You can only hope to God you’ve got it. Talent is an amalgam of high sensitivity; easy vulnerability; high sensory equipment (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting – intensely); a vivid imagination as well as grip on reality; the desire to communicate one’s own experience and sensations, to make one’s self heard and seen.”

Uta Hagen, “Respect for Acting” page 13

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To engender an appreciation and understanding of the experience of theatre -
- To explore the question “what does it mean to be human” as it relates to characters as well as our portrayal of those characters –
- To examine and explore – to challenge – to question our role as artist –
- To accept the process of “studying acting” as an ongoing one –

It is difficult to define educational goals in terms of learning in the performing arts as the ability “to learn” is dependent on the individual’s personal development. An actor’s basic instrument is the self...the voice, body, mind, and heart. What the artist does with this instrument is dependent upon the imagination and willingness to explore.

What creates living believable characters is an intangible – an ability to join the instrument with an awareness of life. Exposure to other’s belief systems, cultures, coping mechanisms, stresses and sufferings as well as joys enhances the understanding of characters and their views and needs. It is this awareness joined with an imaginative instrument that allows life to created characters.

Experiential is the operative word in this class. Absences are not acceptable. If there are problems notify me and we will discuss our options, otherwise please note – **IF YOU MISS MORE THAN TWO CLASSES IT WILL AFFECT YOUR GRADE SEVERLY, AS IN A FULL LETTER GRADE DROP!** Theatre is a collaborative so is this class. All members must be present for that to be successful.

Because experiencing the exercises we do is crucial, active participation is a must. We will do acting/movement exercises that will feel awkward. Avoid making excuses or arguing it is uncomfortable but attempt the experiment. Do not be afraid of what you will discover. Avoid being intimidated by the unknown – take a risk – throw yourself into the exercise, give yourself permission to “play”.

You are in this together. Leave whatever problems, difficulties, or personality conflicts one may have outside! In life we must and do work with all types of people. Some we like some we don't, but “getting over it” is crucial to our artistic endeavors.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Attend** all classes and participate, this is not a lecture class! Participation does not mean talking just to hear one's voice or to be argumentative – participation means to be actively engaged in this class. Some of the exercises will seem strange – avoid judging them – experience them. *** **AGAIN - IF YOU MISS MORE THAN TWO CLASSES IT WILL AFFECT YOUR GRADE, SEVERLY, AS IN A FULL LETTER DROP!**
2. **Journal** – Just as you keep notes for a research paper your journal will be your note collector for the question “what does it mean to be human?” You are the subject. Try to write at least 5 times a week. Dialogue with yourself about your feelings, experiences and observations. Write about the exercises we do in class, which ones were difficult – why? Did they make you self-conscious – why? Where do you hold your nerves? Tensions? How does your body react in play time? Stress time? What is your greatest fear about “Acting class”? Write about your work on the scenes. Write about your confusion, boredom, frustration – write about being human. Reflection is key.
3. Attend **all** McCoy productions plus a few special events
January 13 – Noam Chomsky; 5pm McCallum Ballroom
February 17&18, 23-26, Treefall 7:30 curtain except 26 at 2, McCoy
March 1-4, and 8-10, Antigone 7:30 curtain, Evergreen Theatre
March 23 and 24 – Chatterbox Audio Theatre, 7:30 McCoy
April 13 and 14 – Children's show...we shall discuss.
April 20 and 21 – Enemy of the People, 7:30 in Studio*
4. Attend **three** off campus productions (check the Flyer for listings.)
Playhouse on the Square – 726-4656
Circuit Playhouse- 726-4656
Theatre Works- 726-4656
Theatre Memphis- 682-8323
Germantown Community Theatre- 754-2680
University of Memphis-678-2523
Hattiloo Theatre – 525-0009
5. **Submit a paragraph** for each performance. Do not take notes during the performance. Watch, observe! After the play write a brief paragraph about the experience. This is NOT a review. We shall discuss!
6. **Perform in 2 scenes + one monologue + one created performance**

7. This term we will attempt a short created piece that is rooted in the Occupy Wall Street movement. Throughout theatre history one finds street theatre...theatre challenging ideas, provoking bystanders, and asking for a change in thought- if not of the political system at least for the spectators. During the Depression the Federal Theatre project created Agi-prop plays; during the 60's "Happenings" took place unannounced on street corners and in parks. Today, there are various forms from Raves (which are really for the participants) to scheduled "events" –of which you will be one. So, READ about Occupy Wall Street; ask your friends, professors, parents about it and let's see what we can create! It should be short, attention catching, and fun, as well as serious and thought provoking. In other words – it is theatre!

Required Plays:

We will discuss this in class.

MID TERM:

A written evaluation of your work. Consult your journal. What was your greatest fear coming into this class? Is that fear still there? What do you perceive to be your strong point in acting? Your weak point? What is your greatest obstacle? What steps can you take to overcome that obstacle? How can others help? What was your goal (the actor's not the character's) for your current scene? Do you believe you accomplished your goal? What would be the next step you would take with the scene? Due Tuesday March 6.

THE FINAL:

1. Scenes and monologues performed for public viewing.
2. A written evaluation of your work throughout the term. Your journal can help you. Do you have a better understanding of characters and how to approach them? Are you more observant both in life and in the theatre? What has been your biggest obstacle in this class?
3. What have you discovered by watching you fellow classmates?

Our Final is scheduled for Saturday May 5 at 1 pm.; possible alternative time- Wednesday May 2 at 8pm. We will decide as a class which time works best.

GRADES AND EXPECTATIONS:

The final grade is based on your performance and artistic growth throughout the term. I would like to say forget about the grade and concentrate on the experiences in the class, realizing that is impossible I propose:

IF you attend and participate in all classes

IF you have all projects in on time

IF you keep up with your journal

You will pass with a "C".

IF you accomplish all of the above and make an honest commitment to challenge yourself

IF there is growth and understanding of your characters

IF you work well with your scene partners and do not miss rehearsals

IF you are respectful of time, space, and the experience

You will pass with a "B".

IF you accomplish all of the above and create believable characters
IF you transport your audience to the special world of the playwright
You will pass with a “B+”.

The process of studying acting is an ongoing one. We will barely scratch the surface this term. If you sleep through class you will get extra rest but little else. If you throw yourself into the exercises and truly attempt to go beyond yourself, you will. What does it mean to be human? Our challenge is to explore that question through the medium of theatre.

Basic Understanding of the use of the Space:

Treat the Studio with respect. It is the place you will be living for awhile.

Do not trash it!

Do not leave food or drink in here!

When you bring in props, bring them in a plastic tub with your name and the scene name taped to it. **When your scene work is completed, remove the container.**

Note, respect of the space does have a bearing on your grade!

PROCESS:

Basically our term will be divided into three sections:

- I. You
- II. The Text
- III. The Performance

These, of course, overlap constantly. Knowing yourself and what makes you tick will help you “know” your characters and will allow them a vivid life. This is not an indulgent self-examination; this is an exercise in discovering the funny parts of ourselves, the impulsive, the intense, the lazy, the silly, the observant self. It is an examination of the way we feel physically, where we hold tensions and how that effects us. Where does your honest laugh originate? Where does your character’s honest laugh originate? How are they different or are they?

The text guides us through dialogue. It gives us necessary information about time and place, but we also discover the who, what, when, why and where through the dialogue. We discover the characters’ wants and needs; we find their super-objective as well as all the small wants. We discover the characters’ rhythm through speech; we learn something about their education, their economic status, their view of life.

Then we share all the discoveries through performance. It is not about being seen – it is about sharing. It is not about getting attention, it is actually about *giving* attention.

SCHEDULE:

The class dictates the schedule. This will make itself clear after the first two weeks. You will receive enough warning before a monologue or scene will be due for viewing. **Ready?**