

“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

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**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 dependant 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 dependant 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.

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 also note your fellow classmates and their growth. Write about your confusion, boredom, frustration – write about being human.
3. Attend **all** McCoy productions.
  - Masks – February 8, 7:30 pm
  - *How I Learned to Drive*, February 15, 16, 21, 22, 23 at 7:30 pm and February 24 at 2pm
  - *An Evening of Vice* March 13,14 and 15 at 7:30 pm
  - *Lysistrata*, April 4, 5, 10, 11, 12 at 7:30pm and April 13 at 2pmAlso, attend at least one session of The Macbeth Symposium, January 25 from 9am to 6 pm; Blount Auditorium. Harry Lennix, actor most Recently seen in New York in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*.

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 review** for each performance. Do not take notes during the performance. Watch, observe! After the play make a few notes. Discuss your observations and responses with your friends. A few days later revisit your notes. We will talk about this in class.
6. **Perform in 2 scenes + one monologue**

**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?

**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. A brief evaluation of each class member. Again consult your journal. What acting obstacles have they overcome? What changes have you seen? Has there been growth?

Our Final is scheduled for Monday, April 28 at 1 pm. Possible alternative times Wednesday April 30, 8pm or Friday May 2, at 8 pm. 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

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 container with your name and the scene name taped to it. When your scene work is completed, remove the container.