



ENGL 234: Drama (cross-listed WGST 393: Inside Out)

West Virginia University

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Never be afraid to sit awhile and think.

Lorraine Hansberry, *Raisin in the Sun*

Course Description

This semester, we will study twentieth-century and contemporary U.S. American plays that invite audiences to think about matters of justice, human connection, social transformation, and pathways to peace. We will read plays across a range of theatrical forms such as social realism, epic theatre, workers' theatre, the choreopoem (a mix of poetry, music, song, dance), and documentary theatre. We will discuss whether certain kinds of plays seem more likely to move audiences to new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

English departments in the U.S. often consider drama a lesser literary form compared to poetry, novels, and essays. (Shakespeare has been the exception.) We will approach dramatic texts as complex literary works and read theatre reviews and scholarly articles to learn about historical context and audience reception. While this is not an acting class, we will use performance as a way to activate the words on the page.

Our main goal is to better understand this world we both inhabit and create.

We have the great fortune to participate in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. This program brings on-campus students and incarcerated students together to take a college class in a highly interactive educational space.

Welcome to class!

Contents of Syllabus

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1. Learning Goals

- Explore the meanings of justice through U.S. American plays
- Develop analytical thinking and writing skills
- Develop a creative writing practice
- Become familiar with theatrical terms
- Strengthen oral and written communication skills
- Build a supportive, challenging, and cooperative intellectual community

2. Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this course, a student should be able to:

- Offer working definitions of justice based on their reading of the plays
- Analyze passages by situating them in their overall literary and historical contexts
- Communicate interpretations of literary works through creative writing
- Identify theatrical forms, devices, and styles
- Communicate ideas effectively in speech, writing, and performance
- Cooperate with others to create performances and projects

3. The Plays

Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935)

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls* (1976)

August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson* (1987)

Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, *The Exonerated* (2000)

Tony Kushner, *Homebody / Kabul* (2002)

Quiara Alegría Hudes, *Water by the Spoonful* (2012)

4. Written Work

English classes often inspire fears about grammar and writing rules. My goal is to give you the tools needed to complete assignments and to ensure everyone is supported in their learning.

Outside students, upload written work to the relevant ECampus folder on the due date.

Inside students, hand in written work during class on the due date. It can be neatly handwritten or typed. If you are writing by hand, estimate how many words you typically fit on one page. Use that as your measure to gauge how many handwritten pages will equal 500 words for you. *Please do not stress over the word requirement; it's meant as a ballpark.*

Outside Students / Need Writing Help? [The Eberly Studio](#) -- a free tutoring service for WVU students -- is located in G02 Colson. Tutors are available to help with any writing project in any course. The Center specializes in helping students with brainstorming, drafting, and revising their work. Phone: (304) 293-5788 | Call for Evansdale and evening hours

Inside Students / Need Writing Help? – In addition to two graduate TAs, we have three graduate mentors. TAs and mentors will be available to assist with your writing.

5. Learning Components and Point System

A. Class Engagement	30 points
B. Four Reader Responses	20 points
C. Midterm Essay	20 points
D. Collaborative Final Project	20 points
E. Individual Reflection on Final Project	10 points

5A. Class Engagement (30 points)

Class engagement consists of two categories: participation and performance groups.

1. Participation 15 points

A good way to prepare for class is to arrive with two or three questions or observations about the reading. There will be many ways to participate—sharing your thoughts on the plays; answering and asking questions; taking initiative in small groups; and reading aloud.

I am committed to creating space for more quiet or introverted students to gather thoughts and decide on what they want to share. We may occasionally pause discussion and write together for a few minutes. Please be conscious of airtime. Let's work together to make sure everyone has ample opportunity to contribute.

Ask me at any point if you have questions about participation points. Also, if you have concerns about discussion or working groups for the performances and final projects, let me know as soon as possible.

2. Performance Group 15 points

Everyone will be assigned to a working group. Each group will collaborate on a short informal, ungraded performance—**approx. 10 minutes**. Think of these performances as a gift to the class. You do not have to do a reading of the play. And you don't have to memorize anything. You simply want to convey your group's understanding of the play (or your questions) by creating something new. Let the performance speak for itself. In most cases, you do not need to set it up by explaining what you're doing. As long as you have meaningfully participated in the performance, you will receive 15 points. You will have class time to prepare.

Your group might choose to:

- Act a brief, important scene -- then re-enact it with a different interpretation
- Highlight through a performance a play's relevance to current events
- Perform an interview with characters or the playwright
- Change the setting to make a point about the original play
- Provide a connection to a song or a movie, etc.

- Break the fourth wall. The phrase “fourth wall” refers to the idea that there is a wall between the staged action and audience; presumably, the audience can see through that wall, but actors cannot see the audience. When the fourth wall is broken, actors speak directly to the audience or otherwise involve the audience in the action. If you want to include audience members in the performance, be sure to get their advance permission.

5B. Reader Responses

Reader responses will help you prepare for discussion and the midterm essay. Due dates are on the syllabus.

Analytical Reader Responses (500 words each)

You will write **two analytical responses** to two plays in the first half of the semester. Offer your interpretation of a specific scene, character, or line. Your response does not need to take on the whole play. It’s often effective to focus on a part and connect it to the whole.

Each analytical response needs to do the following:

- 1) Include at least **three direct quotations** from the play. Provide page numbers in parentheses after the quote. (See the sample response in the packet and ECampus.)
- 2) Include **idea-driven and coherent paragraphs**. In each paragraph, offer a topic sentence and develop that specific idea or observation. The topic sentence usually appears toward the beginning or the end of a paragraph. The important thing is that your paragraph holds together as a unit of thought.

Ways to get started on your response:

- Pose a question about the play that you can’t answer. Try to answer it.
- Focus on a quotation and situate it within both the scene and the overall play
- Explore a visual image or define a key word or phrase
- Imagine how you would stage a scene or how you would cast certain roles
- Consider the contemporary relevance of the play
- Reflect on connections to other literary works

Creative Reader Responses (maximum of 1000 words)

You will write **two creative responses** to two plays in the second half of the semester. Your goal is to communicate your understanding of the literary work in a creative way. These responses have no minimum length (max is 1000 words). You do not need to quote directly from the literary works, and you do not have to write in paragraphs. You might compose a poem, for instance.

Below are ideas for creative responses. You are not limited to these.

- **Create a Comic:** Draw a comic strip or panel that engages with some part of the play. Your comic might include dialogue or thought bubbles.
- **Be the Author:** Write an additional scene for one of the plays. Your scene should illuminate an important question or insight about the original. Your scene might occur within, before, or after the time of the play.

- **Create a Dialogue:** Imagine a conversation between two characters. The characters could be from the same or different plays. Or you might put two playwrights into an imagined conversation. Look for ways to share your understanding of the plays.
- **Conduct an Interview:** Imagine an interview with a character or playwright. Explain who is conducting the interview, where, when. Your interview might help us define key terms, understand concepts, make sense of a confusing part of the play.
- **Write a Letter:** Compose a letter to a character or playwright. This letter should discuss a real question you have about the original and convey your interpretation.
- **Create a Newsletter:** A student once developed an entire newsletter based on our course readings.

5C. Midterm Essay (20 points)

Around the midterm, you will write a five-page essay. We will collect drafts and provide feedback. You will have an opportunity to revise your work. I will give you detailed instructions in writing closer to the deadline. There is a sample argumentative essay in your packet and on ECampus.

5D. Collaborative Final Project (20 points)

For the final project, you will collaborate in groups on a proposal for new educational programming at SCI-Greene. You will decide how to present your ideas to the class. Your presentation could be a formal presentation, a short play, a panel discussion, an interactive workshop, etc. You will have time in class to work on these projects.

5E. Individual Reflection on Final Project (10 points)

Reflect on your project (approx. 500 words). What did you contribute? You might describe the group process, group dynamics, how the project evolved. Did anything surprise you? What did you learn?

6. English Major Program Goals

English Major Program Goals

Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

7. Grading Scale

A+	100-98	A	97-92	A-	91-90
B+	89-88	B	87-82	B-	81-80
C+	79-78	C	77-72	C-	71-70
D+	69-68	D	67-62	D-	61-60
F	59 and below				

8. University Policy Statements

Academic Integrity Statement

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, instructors will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of their courses. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the West Virginia University [Academic Standards Policy](#). Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see your instructor before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Academic Standards Policy, including Academic Dishonesty

The WVU Catalog contains the full [Undergraduate Academic Standards Policy](#) and [Graduate Academic and Professional Standards Policy](#)

[Resources for Faculty and Students for Reporting and Appealing Violations of Academic Standards](#)

Adverse Weather Statement

In the event of inclement or threatening weather, everyone should use their best judgment regarding travel. Safety should be the main concern. If you cannot get to class because of adverse weather conditions, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible. Similarly, if your instructor(s) are unable to reach the class location, they will notify you of any cancellation or change as soon as possible, using agreed upon methods to prevent students from embarking on any unnecessary travel. If you cannot get to class because of weather conditions, instructors will make allowances relative to required attendance policies, as well as any scheduled tests, quizzes, or other assessments.

Appropriate Use of Technology Statement

Use of technology in the classroom should always be directly related to class activities and/or course learning outcomes. Inappropriate technology use can be an impediment to learning and a distraction to all members of the class. As such, inappropriate use of technology in the classroom may be considered a disruption of the class and constitute a violation of the [WVU Student Conduct Code](#) and could potentially result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct. Use of technology in the classroom when specifically prohibited by the instructor may also constitute a violation of WVU's [Academic Integrity](#) policy.

Campus Safety Statement

The WVU Police are committed to creating and maintaining a safe learning environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Part of this mission includes educating the campus community on how to respond to potential campus threats, such as the threat of an active

shooter on campus or other suspicious behaviors. Fortunately, WVU Police offer training - both online and in-person - on how to handle a variety of campus safety scenarios. All students are encouraged to visit the [WVU Police](#) webpage, in particular the content under the [Active Shooter](#) training program. Students are also encouraged to report any suspicious behaviors on campus using the [Report a Threat](#) portion of the webpage. Additional materials on campus safety prepared by WVU Police, including special safety tips and training, will also be provided on our eCampus page.

Notice of Class Recording Policy

Meetings of a course at West Virginia University (WVU), whether online or in-person, may be recorded. Recordings are not guaranteed, and are intended to supplement the planned class session. Recordings will be made available to class participants, which may include students, assistants, guest lecturers, and co-facilitators. Recordings may be shared by the instructor or institution in accordance with WVU Rules and policies. The Recordings are owned by and contain intellectual property of WVU. The Recordings may not be shared, copied, reproduced, redistributed, transferred, or disseminated in any form or by any means without the prior written consent of authorized officials of WVU.

COVID-19 Syllabus Statement

WVU is committed to maintaining a safe learning environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Should campus operations change because of health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that this course will move to a fully online delivery format. If that occurs, students will be advised of technical and/or equipment requirements, including remote proctoring software.

In a face-to-face environment, our commitment to safety requires students, staff, and instructors to observe the social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE) guidelines set by the University at all times. While in class, students will sit in assigned seats when applicable and wear the required PPE. Should a student forget to bring the required PPE, PPE will be available in the building for students to acquire. Students who fail to comply will be dismissed from the classroom for the class period and may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for further sanctions.

If a student becomes sick or is required to quarantine during the semester, they should notify the instructor. The student should work with the instructor to develop a plan to receive the necessary course content, activities, and assessments to complete the course learning outcomes.

Inclusivity Statement

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in your classes, please advise your instructors and make appropriate

arrangements with [the Office of Accessibility Services](#). More information is available at the [Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) as well.

Incomplete Policy

The WVU Catalog contains the full [Incomplete Policy](#).

Mental Health Statement - Main Campus

Mental health concerns or stressful events can adversely affect your academic performance and social relationships. WVU offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns that you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at the Carruth Center for Psychological and Psychiatric Services (CCPPS) website: <https://carruth.wvu.edu/>

If you are in need of crisis services, call the CCPPS main number 24/7: (304) 293-4431.

Crisis services are also available through text: Text WVU to 741741 for support 24/7 from a trained Crisis Counselor.

Student Advocacy Center

Part of the Campus and Community Life, a Division of Student Life, the [Student Advocacy Center](#) is comprised of the Senior Associate Dean of Student Life who serves as the Student Advocate, Student Legal Services, the Off-Campus Housing Office, Commuter Student Programs, Non-traditional Student Assistance, and the Student HelpLine. The goal of the Center is to assist students with non-academic questions and concerns and to make the proper referrals when necessary.

Questions are answered daily about many concerns that students may have. The Advocacy Center is designed to simplify procedures and to help students cut through red tape by finding answers to questions and helping to familiarize our students with campus policies and procedures. We specialize in problem solving and helping our students be better informed about making the decisions they need to make, whether these decisions involve classes or any other aspect of university life. The Student Help Line number is 304-293-5555.

Sale of Course Material Statement

All course materials, including lectures, class notes, quizzes, exams, handouts, presentations, and other course materials provided to students for their courses are protected intellectual property. As such, the unauthorized purchase or sale of these materials may result in disciplinary sanctions under the [Student Conduct Code](#).

Sexual Misconduct Statement

West Virginia University does not tolerate sexual misconduct, including harassment, stalking, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or relationship violence [[BOG Rule 1.6](#)]. It is important for you to know that there are resources available if you or someone you know

needs assistance. You may speak to a member of university administration, faculty, or staff; keep in mind that they have an obligation to report the incident to the [Title IX Coordinator](#).

If you want to speak to someone who is permitted to keep your disclosure confidential, please seek assistance from the [Carruth Center](#), 304-293-9355 or 304-293-4431 (24-hour hotline), and locally within the community at the [Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center](#) (RDVIC), 304- 292-5100 or 304-292-4431 (24-hour hotline).

For more information, please consult [WVU's Title IX Office](#)

Student Evaluation of Instruction Statement

Effective teaching is a primary mission of West Virginia University. Student evaluation of instruction provides the university and the instructor with feedback about your experiences in the course for review and course improvement. Your participation in the evaluation of course instruction is both strongly encouraged and highly valued. Results are strictly confidential, anonymous, and not available to the instructor until after final grades are released by Admissions and Records. Information about how you can complete this evaluation will be provided by your instructor.

9. Schedule

Please arrive at class having read the material for that day and completed any written assignments. If we cannot meet, continue to read according to the schedule. Secondary readings are in the course packet and on ECampus.

Date	Readings	Assignments
Aug 11	Inside Students' First Meeting	
Aug 17	Outside Students' First Meeting / Colson 130	
Aug 24	First Combined Class Activity: Wagon Wheel "Ways to Read a Play" Language Use Organize Performance Groups	
Aug 31	Clifford Odets, <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> (1935) Lee Papa, "We Gotta Make Up Our Minds" Sam Hurvitt, " <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> : Powerful Reminder of What Labor Day is All about," review of <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> Sample Reader Response (analytical)	
Sept 7	Lorraine Hansberry, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (1959) Kristin Matthews, "The Politics of 'Home' in Lorraine Hansberry's <i>Raisin in the Sun</i> "	First Analytical Reader Response to <i>Waiting</i> or <i>Raisin</i>
Sept 14	Ntozake Shange, <i>for colored girls</i> (1976) Ayanna Prescod, "Broadway Revival of Ntozake Shange's Riveting Work Reminds Black Women They are Enough," review of <i>for colored girls</i> Discuss Essay Assignment	
Sept 21	Tony Kushner, "How Do You Make Social Change?" Diana Adesola Mafe, "Black Women on Broadway" Discussion of Reader Responses / Working Theses	Second Analytical Reader Response to <i>for colored girls</i>

Sept 28	August Wilson, <i>The Piano Lesson</i> (1987) Tim Dunleavy, "Review of <i>The Piano Lesson</i> at McCarter Theatre Center"	
Oct 5 Grades due Oct 6	Writing Workshop	Essay Drafts
Oct 12	Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, <i>The Exonerated</i> (2000) Ben Brantley, "Someone Else Committed Their Crimes," review of <i>The Exonerated</i>	
Oct 19	Discussion of Essays	Final Essays Due
Oct 26	Tony Kushner, <i>Homebody / Kabul</i> (2002) Dale Tracy, "Cain and Culpability"	First Creative Response to <i>Piano Lesson</i> or <i>The Exonerated</i>
Nov 2	Quiara Alegría Hudes, <i>Water by the Spoonful</i> (2012) Charles McNulty, "Broken souls, and a cast, in search of connection," review of <i>Water by the Spoonful</i>	
Nov 9	Final Projects Group Work	Second Creative Response to <i>Homebody/Kabul</i> or <i>Water by the Spoonful</i>
Nov 16 Last day to withdraw Nov 15	Final Project Presentations	
Thanksgiving		
Nov 30	Preparation for Closing Ceremony	
Dec 7	Closing Ceremony	Final Reflections Due