

# PLAY(S): Theater and Games

Theater R1A (Section 1): Introduction to Dramatic Literature

Fall 2003

MWF 10-11 AM

221 Wheeler

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**Office:** 130 Dwinelle Annex

**Office Hours:** Monday 11:30 am - 1:30 pm and by appointment

**Course Web Site:** <http://theaterandgames.blogspot.com>

## CLASS DESCRIPTION

Members of this class will improve their writing skills as we explore the connection between plays (theater) and play (games).

### Questions we'll explore include:

What is a game, and how do we know when we are playing?

What kinds of live performance are particularly game-like?

Why do games appear so frequently in modern drama as a central metaphor?

Is "playing" a part on stage really *playful*?

Do audiences and spectators get to play, too?

How do contemporary game designers draw on theatrical models?

How do we play (roles and games) in everyday life?

### Our collective investigations will consist of:

**reading** (dramatic literature, theater history, theories of play, and game criticism);

**playing** (acting exercises, playground games, party games, computer games, life);

**brainstorming** (informal weekly discussion on our course blog); and

**writing** (3 formal writing assignments with peer review, a midterm writing workshop, and a final exam paper)

## REQUIRED TEXTS

*Note: While specific editions are recommended, any edition you may already have or can find for a better price is also fine.*

Course Reader.

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.* 6th Edition recommended. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

Stoppard, Tom. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.* New York: Grove Press, 2001.

Strunk, William, Jr., E.B. White and Roger Angell. *The Elements of Style.* 4th Edition recommended. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

## GRADING

Your final grade will be based on the following criteria:

**Class participation** (including in-class discussion, peer review writing workshops, game play and “minute papers”, see below): **20%**

**Blog responses** (informal weekly writing assignments, see below): **20%**

**Papers** (3 formal writing assignments and a final exam paper, see below): **60%**

## COURSE POLICIES

**Attendance** is crucial for succeeding in this course. As per department policy, I will allow TWO unexcused absences (which may NOT fall on a Peer Review Workshop day). Each additional unexcused absence will reduce your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade. (An A becomes an A-, i.e.) Excused absences include documented medical appointments or emergencies, religious observances or absences cleared with me at least 24 hours in advance. NOTE: If you arrive late to class or leave class early, it may count as an unexcused absence. Please see me in either case.

Positive and consistent **class participation** is essential! I expect to hear everyone’s voice at every class meeting. When we play games together, you are expected to participate or observe with interest, enthusiasm and creativity. When we conduct Peer Review Workshops, you are expected to generate and accept useful feedback for and from your classmates.

Unless we are discussing and playing mobile games, please have (and keep) your **cell phones** turned off and put away when you enter the classroom.

You will be responsible for completing all reading and play assignments, without exception, by the day they will be discussed. Be prepared for regular “**minute papers**,” short and open-ended in-class writing assignments of 5 minutes or less that focus on the assigned readings. Sometimes these minute papers will be written at the beginning of class, to evaluate your preparation; sometimes they will be written after class discussion, to gauge your participation and attention. If you are keeping up with readings and discussion, these minute papers should be a fun and non-stressful alternative to quizzes.

You will be asked to comment at least once a week on our **course blog**, where I will post my own reflections, suggestions for at-home play experiments, and questions for you to consider after each class meeting. You can choose which day each week to post, but you are responsible for keeping track of your posts so that you do not get behind in your posting or accidentally miss a week. Your comments will be evaluated primarily for thoughtfulness and willingness to engage in our collective investigation. Because these are informal writing assignments, you are encouraged to be personal and/or creative in your responses. As always, good faith efforts at proper spelling and punctuation are important, but this is secondary to the exchange and flow of ideas. You are encouraged to aim for about a paragraph’s worth of writing when you post, and to read as many of your classmates’ posts as possible. More frequent posting will be considered for extra-credit if the posts are consistently of high quality.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

You will be asked to complete four formal writing assignments for this course, including *first* and *final* drafts for Assignments #1, 2, and 3. They are:

1. A review of a personal “play experience” (3 pages, 10% of final grade);
2. A close reading of dramatic literature (4 pages, 15% of final grade);
3. An open letter to a play or performance theorist (4 pages, 15% of final grade);
4. A Take-Home Final Exam Essay. (6 pages, 20% of final grade).

Detailed instructions for each assignment will be provided later in the semester.

Please keep in mind: Writing assignments must be turned in at the *beginning* of class on the day they are due, or they will be considered late. Papers drop half a letter grade for each class meeting they are late. Papers more than one week late will not be accepted. The final exam paper will not be accepted late, period.

FULL OR PARTIAL PLAGIARISM (1 or more paragraphs) WILL RESULT IN AN F ON THE ASSIGNMENT, not to mention bad karma. Don’t do it.

## SCHEDULE

### **August 25 MONDAY**

Introduction to Class.

### **August 27 WEDNESDAY**

Read for today: Brian Sutton-Smith handout: “Diversity of Play Forms and Experiences” (1 page); Johan Huizinga handout: “Homo Ludens” (1 page); and Kevin Maroney’s “What Is a Game?” (3 pages)

In class: Discuss play vs. games, play forms and personal play experiences.

### **August 29 FRIDAY**

Read for today: Michael Apter’s “A Structural Phenomenology of Play.” (16 pages)

In class: Lecture.

### **September 1 MONDAY**

No Class: LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

### **September 3 WEDNESDAY**

Read for today: Selections from Richard Schechner’s “Play” from *Performance Studies: An Introduction*: “The Joker in the Deck,” “What is Play? What is Playing?,” “Some Qualities of Playing,” “Seven Ways to Approach Play,” “Types of Playing.” (7 pages)

In class: Reading review and discussion.

### **September 5 FRIDAY**

Read for today: More selections from Richard Schechner’s “Play” from *Performance Studies: An Introduction*: “Play Acts, Play Moods,” “Flow, or Experiencing Playing,” “Transitional Objects, Illusions, and Culture,” “An Ethological Approach to Play.” (6 pages)

In class: Reading review and discussion.

### **September 8 MONDAY**

Read for today: “Writing for College” by Joseph M. Williams and Lawrence McEnerney.

In class: Reading review; discuss writing strategies and guidelines for Writing Assignment #1.

### **September 10 WEDNESDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Collective Play.

Note: Mandatory blogging after today’s class.

**September 12 FRIDAY**

Read for today: More selectons from Richard Schechner's "Play" from *Performance Studies: An Introduction*: "The Message, 'This is Play'," "Bateson's *Othello*," "Philosophies of Play." (9 pages)

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**September 15 MONDAY**

Read for today: More selectons from Richard Schechner's "Play" from *Performance Studies: An Introduction*: "The Bias Against Play," "*Maya-Lilia*," "Deep Play, Dark Play," "Conclusion." (9 pages)

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**September 17 WEDNESDAY**

Read for today: From *Elements of Style*, Chapter II: Elementary Principles of Composition: Rules 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, and Chapter V: An Approach to Style: Rules 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 16

In class: Discuss *Elements* and MLA Formatting and Citations. Bring your *MLA Handbook*!

**September 19 FRIDAY**

Due today: FIRST DRAFT OF WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1. Bring 2 copies.

In class: Peer Review Workshop #1.

**September 22 MONDAY**

Read for today: AND E.M. Avedon's "The Structural Elements of Games" (8 pages) AND Greg Costikyan's "I Have No Words and I Must Design." (17 pages)

In class: Reading review and discussion. (Paper drafts returned with comments.)

**September 24 WEDNESDAY**

Read for today: Excerpts from James P. Carse's *Finite and Infinite Games*.

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**September 26 FRIDAY**

Due today: FINAL DRAFT OF WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1

In class: Collective Play.

**September 29 MONDAY**

Read for today: Thomas Whitaker's "Speaking of Playing" from *Fields of Play in Modern Drama* (4 pages) and Samuel Selden's "The Game and the Stakes" from *Theatre Double Game*. (13 pages)

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**October 1 WEDNESDAY**

Read for today: "Playing in Shakespeare" handout and Paul G. Brewster's "Games and Sports in Shakespeare" (21 pages).

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**October 3 FRIDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Feedback on Writing Assignment #1; Discuss Guidelines for Writing Assignment #2.

**October 6 MONDAY**

Read for today: Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*.

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**October 8 WEDNESDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Continue discussing *Rosencrantz*.

**October 10 FRIDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Continue discussing *Rosencrantz*.

**October 13 MONDAY**

Read for today: Michael Oriard's "The Game and the Nation" from *Sporting with the Gods* (28 pages).

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**October 15 WEDNESDAY**

Read for today: Richard Schechner's "The Olympics: Globalism's Signature Performance" from *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (4 pages).

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**October 17 FRIDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: MIDTERM WRITING WORKSHOP.

**October 20 MONDAY**

Read for today: Neil Labute's "A Gaggle of Saints" from *Bash*.

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**October 22 WEDNESDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Continue discussing "A Gaggle of Saints."

**October 24 FRIDAY**

Due Today: First Draft Paper #2. Bring 2 copies.

In-Class: Peer Review Workshop #2.

**October 27 MONDAY**

Read for today: Excerpts from Gary Izzo's *The Art of Play*.

In class: Reading review and discussion. (Paper drafts returned with comments.)

**October 29 WEDNESDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Continue discussion of *The Art of Play*.

**October 31 FRIDAY Halloween!**

Due Today: Final Draft Paper # 2.

In class: Halloween Collective Play; Discuss guidelines for Writing Assignment #3.

**November 3 MONDAY**

Read for today: TBD.

In class: Acting games. Special guest acting instructor.

Note: Blogging after this class meeting is mandatory.

**November 5 WEDNESDAY**

Read for today: TBD.

In class: Acting games. Special guest acting instructor.

Note: Blogging after this class meeting is mandatory.

**November 7 FRIDAY**

Read for today: TBD.

In class: Acting games. Special guest acting instructor.

Note: Blogging after this class meeting is mandatory.

**November 10 MONDAY**

Read for today: Excerpts from Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*.

In class: Reading review and mini-lecture.

**November 12 WEDNESDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Collective Play: Image Theater Workshop.

**November 14 FRIDAY**

Due Today: First Draft Paper #3. Bring 2 copies.

In class: Peer Review Workshop #3.

**November 17 MONDAY**

Read for today: Excerpts from Martin Esslin's *Theater of the Absurd*.

In class: Reading review and discussion. (Paper drafts returned with comments.)

**November 19 WEDNESDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Existentialism primer and discussion.

**November 21 FRIDAY**

Due Today: Final Draft Paper #3.

In-Class: Collective Play.

**November 24 MONDAY**

Read for today: Eugene Ionesco's *Killing Game*.

In class: Mini-lecture; discuss *Killing Game*.

**November 26 WEDNESDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Continue discussing *Killing Game*.

**November 28 FRIDAY**

***No Class. Thanksgiving Break!***

**December 1 MONDAY**

Read for today: Samuel Beckett's *Play*.

In class: Reading review and discussion.

**December 3 WEDNESDAY**

No reading for today.

In class: Continue discussing *Play*; go over guidelines for Final Exam Paper.

**December 5 FRIDAY *Last Class!***

No reading for today.

In class: Collective Play.

**December 12 FRIDAY**

Due Today: FINAL EXAM PAPER.