Sample syllabus for:

THE 201 CRITICAL ANALYSES OF THEATRE LITERATURE

Course Description

Critical and structural analyses of dramatic and performance texts with emphasis on the successful translation of theatre literature from page to stage. This course provides a common working vocabulary and an introduction to critical methodologies that support the development and communication of production ideas and aesthetic interpretation.

This course is part of the Core Requirements for the Major in Theatre Production and Theatre Performance. Prerequisite: THE 101.

Learning Objectives:

- To introduce theatre students to the basic principles, techniques, and challenges of script analysis, where the text is examined from a production viewpoint rather than for literary merit.
- To provide students with a methodology that enables them to interpret a play from the perspective of performer, director, and/or designer in preparation for the rehearsal and development process.
- To enable students to better articulate their critical positions and aesthetic insights, both orally and in writing.

Required Texts:

Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays. David Ball. Southern Illinois Press, 1998.

30 Ten Minute Plays for 2 Actors from Actor's Theatre of Louisville's National Ten-Minute Play Contest. Michael Bigelow Dixon, ed. Smith & Krause, 2001.

Reading List (examples)

Betrayal. Harold Pinter. Acting ed. Dramatists Play Service.
By the Bog of Cats. Marina Carr. Acting ed. Dramatist's Play Service
The Heidi Chronicles. Wendy Wasserstein. Acting ed. Dramatist's Play Service.
True West. Sam Shepard. Acting ed. Samuel French. Inc.
Death of a Salesman. Arthur Miller. Acting ed. Dramatists Play Service.
The Glass Menagerie. Tennessee Williams. Acting ed. Dramatists Play Service.
M. Butterfly. David Henry Wang. Acting ed. Dramatists Play Service.

Teaching Method:

Class meets two times per week. Teaching methods may include lecture, discussion, class exercises, assigned reading and related homework.

Participation: Discussion is a crucial aspect of the class. Students are expected to complete the assigned reading on schedule and to actively participate in discussion over the course of the semester. To help prepare for discussion, students will complete a preliminary review form for each play that we read; it is due the same day as the reading assignment is due. In-class exercises may be used to further facilitate discussion.

Script Analysis Projects:

1. **Story project** for *Betrayal*
2. **Linear plot project** for *By the Bog of Cats*
3. **Episodic plot project** for The *Heidi Chronicles*.
4. **Action project** for *True West*
5. **Given circumstances project** for *Death of a Salesman*
6. **Character project** for *The Glass Menagerie*
7. **Image and research project** for *M Butterfly*

8. Final Project—**production concept and script analysis** for a Ten-Minute play (your choice)

Production Response Essays: Students are expected to see three productions and to write a short (2 page) essay for two of the three shows

Grading Criteria: Some significant criteria for the evaluation of analytical projects, written work, presentations, and discussion include:

- Evidence of preparation for participation in class (i.e. completion—and contemplation—
- of the assigned reading).
- Thoughtfulness, insight, and quality of ideas; scope and depth of analysis; persuasive
- support and development of argument
- Evidence of mastery of script analysis skills
- Professional/academically appropriate written work and oral presentations
- Grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, proofreading of written work

Grades will be determined by the following breakdown:

Active Participation (discussion & in-class work)	15%
Story project for Play #1	5%
Linear plot project for Play #2	5%
Episodic plot project for Play #3.	10%
Action project for Play #4	10%
Given circumstances project for *Play #5*	10%
Character project forPlay #6	10%
Image and research project for *Play #6*	10%
Two Production Response Essays	@ 5% each 10%
Final Project—production concept and script analysis for a Ten-Minute play (your choice)	15%
TOTAL	100%

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY: Late assignments will be accepted, but will be penalized one full letter grade for each late day.

COURSE CALENDAR

1 R Introduction Buy Books (& Crayons!)
2 T Story & Plot Structure
R *Backward and Forwards Backwards & Forwards*
3 T *Betrayal*
R continued
4 T *By the Bog of Cats By the Bog of Cats*
Betrayal Assignment Due
R continued
5 T continued
R *The Heidi Chronicles The Heidi Chronicles*
***Bog of Cats* Assignment Due**

6 T continued
R continued

7 T *True West True West*
***Heidi* Assignment Due**
R continued

8 T continued

R continued
***True West* Assignment Due; *Balm in Gilead* essay due**
(M Mid-semester withdrawal deadline)
9 T *Death of a Salesman Death of a Salesman*
R continued

10 T continued
R 1 continued
***Exonerated* essay due**
Death of a Salesman Assignment Due

11 T *The Glass Menagerie*
R **FALL BREAK**

12 *Glass Menagerie* continued
R 11 *M Butterfly M Butterfly*
Glass Menagerie Project Due

13 T continued **(*Man/Dinner* opens 11-9)**
R 11/9 continued

14 T continued
R 11/16 ***M Butterfly* Image Presentations**

15 T ***M Butterfly* Research Presentations**
***Man Who Came to Dinner* essay**
R **THANKSGIVING**

16 T continued
R continued

17 T Wrap-up and evaluations
F 1 **Final Project due**

Basics of Script Analysis

I. Foundations of the Plot (the "what" of the play)
   A. Given Circumstances
      1. Time
         a. When the action is set
         b. Dramatic time (how much time passes)
      2. Place
      3. Society
         a. Family, friends, lovers
         b. Occupational Group
         c. Status groups--gender, race, class
         d. Social standards--rules of behavior
      4. Political/legal system
      5. Spirituality
      6. Significance of title

B. Background story: what it is and how it is disclosed
C. Character
    1. Basic identifiers: gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality; significance of name
    2. Objectives: super-objective and smaller objectives ("I want to [verb] in order to [purpose].")
    3. Dramatic action (behavioral tactics to achieve objectives)
    4. Conflict
    5. Willpower
    6. Values
    7. Personality Traits
    8. Complexity or capacity for awareness
    9. Relationships
    10. Function in the play

II. Plot/Structure (also see elements of choreographic structure for dance and musical structure for song)
A. Physical Actions
B. Psychological Actions/Inner Plot
C. Plot Progressions: beats, units, scenes, acts
D. Plot Structure
    1. Point of Attack
    2. Inciting Action
    3. Complications or obstacles
    4. Crises
    5. Climax
    6. Resolution

III. How the Play Means
A. Language
    1. Dialogue: words, sentences, speeches, special qualities, theatricality
    2. Tempo, Rhythm, Mood (also see dynamics of dance)
B, Recurrent Images: visual, aural, kinesthetic, ideational
C. Style (dominance of certain elements--plot? character? idea?; degree to which the play reflects reality; relationship to theatrical conventions)
D. Genre (tragedy, melodrama, comedy, farce)
E. Idea/Unifying Principle/Theme/Message/Argument