

## AHS Humanities 12

# Theatre Lab

1:13 - 2:12 p.m. & Wednesdays 1:35-2:25 p.m.

Instructor: Marcus Renner

Digital Portfolio: <http://marcushumanities12.weebly.com>

Email: [marcus.renner@animashighschool.com](mailto:marcus.renner@animashighschool.com)

Office Hours: Friday: 3:15 to 4:15 pm (or by appointment)

## Course Description

Theatre Lab is a course for those interested in storytelling. Students will try out acting, directing, and writing for stage and screen all in the service of presenting a compelling story to an audience. After initial exposure to key ideas and concepts, students will be able to specialize in a particular area and create a highly personal final project that will be a part of a showcase performance in the spring. The class will run in conjunction with the Theatre Ensemble Exploratory, which will provide actors and directors and technicians for student projects. Concepts covered will include the use of image, movement, and dialogue to tell stories; creating a story arc, establishing a dramatic question, and creating compelling, believable characters.

Theatre often suggests performing in front of large groups of people. Theatre Lab will NOT require you perform. You can focus on writing short plays (or films) in which others will perform or direct students in a performance. The skills you learn about storytelling will help your ability to understand and enjoy all kinds of literature, performance, and film. Students will finish the semester with a clearer idea of the relationship they want with this world and how they might explore these subjects in higher education.

Essential Question: What relationship do you want to the world of theater and performance?

Goal: For students to understand the elements of storytelling through performance

Outcomes: Students will increase their...

- understanding what makes a good story
- skill at using images to convey meaning
- ability to create sympathetic characters
- understanding of how to hold the attention of an audience

## Project Description

The final project will provide an opportunity for students to synthesize and apply the core storytelling skills that we will discuss (see below). Students will have great flexibility in designing their final project. The course is designed to support the following:

- writing a short play or screenplay
- performing of a monologue or short scene
- directing a short play or film

Upon consultation, final projects can take other forms, but students should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- presentation of project should be roughly ten minutes in length
- presentation should fit within the spring showcase format
- presentation will in some way tell a story
- project should demonstrate core storytelling skills (listed below)

You can collaborate with other students on your project, but each student must have a distinct and substantial role within the project that demonstrate acquired skills. For example, two students to work together to act out a scene, but the parts must be of equal length. One student can write a play that another directs or acts in. Some individual projects will require help to stage and I encourage to help your classmates even if you are working on your own story.

## Course Structure

I've organized the course around seven core storytelling skills:

- imagining compelling circumstances
- storytelling through movement
- turning a scene
- investing in a character
- building a story arc
- giving words a reason
- communicating through images

After an initial period building trust and practicing teamwork, we'll spend a bit of time on each skill. I'll give you exercises in class and a few homework assignments that will allow you to understand and practice each skill. Class time will be a mix of games, table readings of polished and draft scripts, film clips, discussions, rehearsals, and project time. During all of these activities, I will be your imperfect coach, working with you to release your inner storyteller and help you reflect on your experience. We'll adjust the schedule as we go along depending on the class' interests and needs.

## Grading

Community learning (15%) – This will encompass your participation in class activities, including contributions to class or small group discussions and peer critique. Each day you're not working solo on your projects, constructive participation will earn you four points. If you arrive late to class, the most you can receive is three points. Less than constructive participation will earn you less.

Formative work (20%) – Formative assignments prepare you to do your best work on your final project. Some of these assignments can count toward your summative grade (see below). Some will hopefully launch you toward new discoveries in your final project. The exact number and nature of the formative assignments is to be determined.

Summative work (65%) - Summative assignments assess you what you have learned about a topic (the sum of your knowledge at a point in time). In the context of theatre, this knowledge must be performed. With this in mind, at any time in the semester you can request to illustrate your knowledge of one of the skills through acting, writing, or directing. There is no specific format for these presentations. They are meant to be informal. You simply have to arrange a time to present or discuss your work. I will give you written or verbal feedback and a letter grade based on a rubric for each skill that you will get ahead of time. If you are not satisfied with your grade, you can redo your presentation. Here's how the presentation will likely play out.

- Writing - I will take your pages home, so I can read them more than once and give you more thoughtful feedback. We'll then talk and you'll explain how your pages demonstrate the skill.
- Acting - You'll perform a monologue or scene or exercise, and I'll give you feedback in the moment as if I'm your director. You'll have the opportunity to try it again if you feel like you want to do better.
- Directing - You'll present a scene with actor or show me a film clip and explain how your directorial and editing choices demonstrate the skill.

You can use some of the formative assignments to demonstrate your mastery of the skills, bring in old projects, or show seemingly unrelated work that you feel illustrates the skill. You can also use rehearsals of some or all of your final project to check skills off your list. You can also take the chance that the performance of your project at the spring showcase will demonstrate all the skills. But I don't advise this.

Each skill is worth 10% of your final summative grade (or 6.5 points of your final grade); the final performance/screening will be worth the remainder 30% (or almost 20 points of your final grade). I'll give a rubric for the evaluation of the final performance. Outstanding work will earn an A; good faith effort and execution during the performance will earn in the B range; lack of focus and preparation will earn lower on a sliding scale.

Extra Credit - I will give extra credit for students that keep a process journal during the class. You must have at least one entry for each skill and three entries about the progress of your final project. That's ten entries overall. To receive full credit, each entry should be at least 300 words, have a theme or thesis, and show a depth of engagement with the activities in class, at-home assignments, or final project. The entries are **not** formal mini-essays, and they don't have to resolve in coherent takeaways or lessons. They can end on questions or an articulation of next steps. You need to meet with me after you turn in your journal to get the credit.

You can earn up to 40 points for your summative grade with the extra credit. You will have the opportunity to distribute however many points you receive from extra credit across your summative assignments to raise your grade.

# Logistics and Expectations

## What to Bring to Class

- your laptop computer
- whatever reading, including pages that I've assigned for the day
- paper and a writing utensil
- a USB storage device
- a notebook for journaling
- markers/highlighters for annotating texts (optional)
- questions and ideas
- 100% of your effort, whatever that is for any given day

## Attendance, Late Arrivals, Early Departures, and Excused Absences

An unexcused absence will lower your community learning grade, and you will miss points for any graded exercise or activity we do in class.

I will take attendance shortly after the start of class. If you are not present at the start of class, I will mark you as tardy. This will lower your community learning grade. You will, however, receive credit for in-class work that you do on that day. If you leave early, without what I judge a sufficient reason, you will lose points on your community learning grade.

Bottom line: If you arrive late, leave early, or decide to miss class, accept responsibility for your choice and move on. My policies in this regard are not about punishment but about fairness to other students in the class.

## Class Etiquette and Decorum

We are a diverse academic community and we will be discussing controversial issues and personal experiences that can elicit strong opinions. It is important that you are tolerant, respectful, and considerate of your fellow classmates during discussion and in all online communication.

You can eat within class, but I may revoke that privilege. The issue is the mess that can sometimes come from having food in class.

If you finish the task at hand, my expectation is that you will use the time to continue working on other assignments, preferably related to our class.

## Electronics

Turn off all electronic devices other than laptops (such as phones, iPods, iPads, etc.) before entering the classroom. Laptops are for specific tasks within the classrooms. Checking email and other browsing are distracting. If you are using your laptop for work and we begin a discussion, please use the 15 degree clamshell.

I will confiscate any electronic device attracting attention in order to help us focus on each other rather than a video screen. If this is a consistent problem, confiscated devices will go to Jake, and you will have to retrieve them from him.

### Communicating with me

Email is the primary tool I will use to contact you between classes and is also the best way to contact me. I will try to respond within 24 hours. Please note, I cannot receive e-mail on my phone and do not send text messages. If you email me right before class, I will not read your message until after class.

### Submitting Work, Formatting, Late Papers

I will accept late work. But it will cost you. I will deduct at least a 1/3 letter grade (e.g. a B- will drop to a C+) if the assignment comes in after the deadline. If it comes in more than a week after the deadline, I will mark it down a full grade. Two weeks, two full grades. And so on.

This means you should submit as soon as you are done by sending me an email with your work as an attachment. In most cases, I will ask you to bring me a hard copy before I will provide a grade. If there is an emergency, and I grant an extension, I will give you a new due date. Otherwise work is due at the deadline.

Formatting for written work will depend on the assignment, but the first page must display the student's name, the instructor's name, AHS Humanities 12, and the assignment's due date. Only 2-sided printing will be accepted.

### Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism is the copying of language, structure, or ideas of another and presenting the work as your own. Plagiarism means using another's work without giving credit. Examples can include the following:

- copying information from the Internet
- allowing someone to revise your work and submitting it as your own
- copying from another student's work
- copying from your previous work without providing a citation

Plagiarism is a serious offense that will result, at the very least, in failure of the assignment with a grade of zero. Not understanding appropriate academic conduct is not an excuse. If you are in doubt about a particular situation, come speak with me.

If I suspect that you have committed an act of academic misconduct, I will discuss it with you and share it with the administration. You may receive a zero on the assignment and potentially fail the course. If you ever have a question about plagiarism or other academic conduct, please ask me before you turn in any work that may be problematic.

# AHS Humanities 12: 2014-15

## Theatre Lab

### A Note to Students

I have drafted this detailed syllabus to answer questions or issues that might arise during the year. Please indicate you have read and understand the syllabus below by signing your name. If you have questions, please ask.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### A Note to Parents

The education of your child is a task shared by parents, teachers, peer groups, and other community members. Please assist me in serving your child by reading the attached syllabus and acknowledging its content by signing in the space below. Please save my contact info or bookmark my digital portfolio (<http://marcushumanities12.weebly.com>) in case you have questions about the course. Also, feel free to use this opportunity to open a line of communication with me by writing in the space below.

I have read and understand the content in this syllabus.

Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything else I should know about yourself, your family, or your son/daughter that will help him or her succeed this year in my classroom? (If you have any comments, questions, or additional information, please write them in the space below.)