

ENVS 411 Communicating Environmental Issues with Theater

COURSE INFO

Monday & Wednesday 10:00-11:50am

Location: Columbia 142

Co-instructors:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our species, ours, has by itself in the course of a couple of generations managed to powerfully raise the temperature of an entire planet, to knock its most basic systems out of kilter. But oddly, though we know about it, we don't know about it. It hasn't registered in our gut; it isn't part of our culture. Art, like religion, is one of the ways we digest what is happening to us, make sense out of it that proceeds to action. Otherwise the only role left to us—noble, but also engaging in its impotence—is simply to pay witness.

-- Bill McKibben, "Imagine That: What the Warming World Needs Now is Art Sweet Art"

University of Oregon Theater Arts professor Theresa May, an affiliate faculty member with Environmental Studies, has noted the ways in which performing arts acts "as medium between material and metaphoric worlds and the ways theater audiences influence performance in an organic exchange of meaning-making" (May, p. 85). Drama is a communications vehicle, unique in its ability to lead participants and audiences through "moments of direct experience, transcending mere knowledge, enriching the imagination, possibly touching the heart and soul as well as the mind."

The aim of this course is to evaluate and illustrate how the theater arts can help communicate, critique, and educate on environmental issues and science.

Students will analyze how environmental science & policy issues are presented "on stage" in different types of performance ranging from avant-garde to Broadway/LORT to street and activist theater. As the course develops, we will shift to analyzing the use of performing arts in community discourse around environmental themes. The course will examine, explore and apply drama techniques as communication tools to support transfer of complex environmental information. We will analyze through active workshops how to work around barriers of accessibility, understanding, culture, etc. Students will examine if and how drama can be used as a unifying language in environmental conflicts that cross many disciplines and livelihoods.

Through groupwork and individual study, students will critically examine and test how drama – as a communications device – can be used in place of "traditional" modes of dialogue around environmental and science-based issues.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- o Attendance and participation in class discussions
- o Attendance on ONE FIELD TRIP excursions to either: (1) To view a theatrical performance at the University of *AWAKE AND SING!* (not environmentally themed) live and in-person, OR (2) To attend a local theater workshop session to see how performance pieces are reworked with a community of peers
THERE IS NO COST FOR EITHER TRIP
- o TWO 1-2 PAGE ANALYSES of environmentally themed performing arts pieces – contemporary or historic. Students will offer insight into how an environmental issue was presented/framed, the use of

communication techniques (character driven, stage directions, etc.), and analyze core messages within the piece.

- WEEKLY JOURNAL assignments to play, experiment, and develop individual theatrical interpretative works. Journal assignments might include writing monologues or dialogues, sketching sets and costumes, describing a choreographed movement piece, developing a character profile, etc. Each entry would surround a specific environmental issue.
- ONE 5-6 PAGE "SCRIPT", puppet show, street composition, etc. about a pre-assigned environmental issue. These might include monologues, dialogues, forum theater, structured conversations for use at conferences and events, descriptions of dance choreography, song lyrics, plans for a performance, or other creative outlines of how the performing arts might be used to communicate a topic. *Students will also provide a demonstrated understanding of the pre-assigned environmental issue with a one-page treatment discussion of main arguments, controversies, misconceptions, etc.*
- GROUP PERFORMANCE PIECE that builds on the individual script assignment. Continuing to use the same environmental issue, students will workshop individual components of their midterm scripts and create a composite of ideas for a final performance piece. Students will work together to determine how best to represent their environmental topic, and will then present their piece in a staged reading. A full range of options for students include creating anything from the above taxonomy (puppet theater, street activism, etc.) to a representation of how drama might be used in bridging gaps in collaborative and/or citizen participatory science. Expectations will be for a final script copy, a poster, and a dress rehearsal staged reading/performance.
- REFLECTION PORTFOLIO that incorporates an individual reflection on the group performance piece, an exploration and refinement of one journal entry, and a short proposal for incorporation of performing arts activities to be designed for use in an ENVS 202 discussion section on a predetermined topic/issue.

All assignment due dates are marked in the course schedule below.

GRADING CRITERIA

Participation and attendance	10%
Weekly Journal	15%
Enviro./Communications theater analyses	15%
"Script" assignment	25%
Group performance project w/team journal component	20%
Individual reflection portfolio	15%

COURSE POLICIES

- CLASS PARTICIPATION
Discussion is vital to this course. You'll be expected to be an active participant in class discussions. That means completing readings before class and engaging professionally in discussion. Although no relevant comment is off-limits in this course, we will be discussing controversial topics and you are expected to treat all members of this class respectfully. Be careful not to dominate discussion so others feel welcome to contribute.
- ATTENDANCE
Don't miss class unless you're sick. We'll all be working to stay healthy this term. If you get the flu, please email us ahead of class so that we know not to expect you. Three or more absences for any reason will result in a full letter reduction of your final grade. Please arrive to class on time.
- In order to pass this class, students must complete and turn in all assigned coursework. No incompletes except in the case of a documented emergency.
- Please retain copies of the original graded work that is returned to you throughout the term. It is your responsibility to keep these original copies as documentation of your grades.

- TECHNOLOGY

No texting. Laptops are not allowed in class unless you receive direct permission for note taking or during peer review sessions.

Individual differences: If you experience difficulty in the class for any reason, please don't hesitate to contact us. If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully participating in this class, please let us know as soon as possible.

The UO offers a range of free services to help students in a variety of situations:

- ACADEMIC LEARNING SERVICES (ALS)

Provides a number of services to help students with coursework. If you are unsure of what sort of services might help you most, ALS is happy to answer questions. <http://als.uoregon.edu>. Phone: 541-346-3226.

- UNIVERSITY COUNSELING AND TESTING CENTER

Provides comprehensive mental health and testing services to UO students. Counseling services are provided through a student paid fee as part of the incidental and student health center fee, so there is no additional cost to students. <http://www.uoregon.edu/counsel/> Phone: 541-346-3227

- DISABILITY SERVICES (DS)

Provides assistance and support to students with documented physical, psychological or learning disabilities and provides accommodations to students based on disability. <http://ds.www.uoregon.edu/>. Phone: 541-346-1155. TTY: 541-346-1083.

COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: OVERVIEW OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEATER ARTS & SCIENCE

Week 1: Introduction to course themes, evolution of “eco-theater” & environmental issues in drama, connecting dramatic arts to communicating science

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- o McKibben, B. (2005, April 21). Imagine That: What the Warming World Needs Now is Art Sweet Art. Grist.org. Available at: <http://www.grist.org/article/mckibben-imagine>.
- o LISTEN TO PODCAST FROM: Palca, J. (2004, October 25). Exploring the Drama of Science, Faithfully. NPR. Available at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4122442>
- o Cless, D. (1996). Eco-Theatre, USA: The Grassroots Is Greener. *The Drama Review*, 40(2), 79-102.

In-class workshops:

- o MONDAY: Improvisation warm-up techniques (non-verbal)
- o WEDNESDAY: Improvisation warm-up techniques (mirroring)

Assignment:

- o DUE WEDNESDAY: Bring journal to class (no entry required)
- o Course readings as required

UNIT 2: WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL THEATER? (Emotional. Plot driven. Simple storytelling. Etc.)

Week 2: Environmental theater for a general audience and main stage productions (Broadway/LORT)

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- o Diggs, E. (1982). *Dumping ground: A play in one act*. New York: Dramatists Play Service.
- o Djerassi, C. (2007). When is “Science on Stage” Really Science? *American Theatre*, 24, 96-107.

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- o Gunderson, L. (2006, July 28). Science plays come of age. *The Scientist Magazine*. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from <http://classic.the-scientist.com/news/display/24160/>
- o SELECTIONS: Act Two
Frayn, M. (1999). *Copenhagen*. London: Methuen Drama.

In-class workshops:

- o MONDAY: Scene analysis and study for *Life of Galileo*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsOBTwa4ZbQ>
- o WEDNESDAY: Scene study from *Copenhagen* and/or *Dumping Ground*

Assignment:

- o **DUE FRIDAY** by email: First 1-2 page analysis of performance piece (See Blackboard assignment)
- o Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- o Course readings as required
- o Discussion of journaling and how to approach journal entry writing/drawing

Week 3: Community-based environmental theater and other formats (street, improvisation, puppet, etc.)

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- o French, W. (1983). A Double-Threaded Life: Maryat Lee's Ecotheatre. *The Drama Review*, 27(2), 26-35.

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- o Martin, H. (1990, August 31). Stage Direction: Actors Use a Play to Educate Field Workers on Rights and Pesticides. *Los Angeles Times*. Available at: http://articles.latimes.com/1990-08-31/local/me-117_1_field-worker
- o Todd, C. (2011, May). The Shared Experience of Absurdity. TED: Ideas Worth Spreading. Available at: http://www.ted.com/talks/charlie_todd_the_shared_experience_of_absurdity.html

In-class workshops:

- o MONDAY: Street theater scripting exercise I
- o WEDNESDAY: Street theater scripting exercise II

Assignment:

- o **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Second 1-2 page analysis of performance piece (See Blackboard assignment)
- o Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- o Course readings as required

UNIT 3: THEATER AS LANGUAGE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DISCUSSION & GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING

Week 4: Giving voice to the voiceless – exploration of social and environmental justice in theater

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- o Bo Sullivan, J. (2006). The Forum Theatre of Augusto Boal: A Dramatic Model for Dialogue and Community-Based Environmental Science. *Local Environment*, 11(6), 627-646.

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- o Augusto Boal, Founder of the Theater of the Oppressed, Interview. (2009). Democracy Now. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rkVD_Oln7g
- o Chapter: Theater for Oppressed
Diamond, D. (2007). *Theatre For Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue*. Trafford Press.

Field trip:

- o Feb. 3rd: No Shame Theater workshop session | 126 W. Broadway | 7:30 PM (Feb. 3) **OR**
- o Feb. 2, 3 or 4th: See UO Theater Production of *Awake & Sing* | Free tickets: <http://pages.uoregon.edu/theatre/freetickets>

In-class workshops:

- o MONDAY: Image theater techniques I (Complete the Image, Remember the Image)
- o WEDNESDAY: Image theater techniques II (Oppression Transformation)

Assignment:

- o Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- o Course readings as required

Week 5: Application of forum theater to environmental issues

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Shawyer, S. (2011). Activist awareness in the theatre of the oppressed classroom. *Canadian Theatre Review*, 147, 12-17.
- Chapter: The Council of All Beings
Seed, J. (1988). *Thinking like a mountain: towards a council of all beings*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Whyte, T. (2009). *The Power of Theatre*. Nepal. Available at: <http://vimeo.com/5122142>
- Chapter: Art of Interactive Theater
Diamond, D. (2007). *Theatre For Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue*. Trafford Press.

In-class workshops:

- MONDAY: Forum theater practice session I
- WEDNESDAY: Forum theater practice session II

Field Trip:

- Friday, February 3rd | 7:30pm
No Shame Theater Workshop, 126 W. Broadway (Atrium Building)

Assignment:

- **DUE WEDNESDAY** group formation for final production project and selection of environmental issue
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required

UNIT 4: ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE & THEATER – SCIENTISTS AS STORYTELLERS

Week 6: How drama can support environmental science community discussion and collaborations

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Legislative Theater: Floods in France. (2005). Eco-Forum Festival. Available at: <http://vimeo.com/2407728>

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Chapter: Rainbow of Desire
Diamond, D. (2007). *Theatre For Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue*. Trafford Press.

In-class workshops:

- MONDAY: Community discussion exercise
- WEDNESDAY: Collaboration-based learning exercise

Assignment:

- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Individual Script Assignment
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required
- Group project

Week 7: Using theater to avoid “Ivory Tower Syndrome” for environmental scientists & advocates

Proposed readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Negrete, A., & Lartigue, C. (2004). Learning from education to communicate science as a good story. *Endeavour*, 28(3), 120-124.
- Robert Weiss. (1971). Protein synthesis: an epic on the cellular level. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9dh00iCLww>

Proposed readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Nadkarni, N. M. (2004). Not Preaching to the Choir: Communicating the Importance of Forest Conservation to Nontraditional Audiences. *Conservation Biology*, 18(3), 602-606.
- Powell, K. (2007, May). Science Night at the Improv. HHMI Bulletin. Available at: <http://www.hhmi.org/bulletin/may2007/chronicle/improv.html>
- Cell Slam. (2009). Available at: http://www.ascb.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=237&Itemid=257

In-class workshops:

- MONDAY: Interpretative dance improvisation exercise
- WEDNESDAY: Cell Slam Revisited!

Assignment:

- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required
- Group project

UNIT 5: COMMUNICATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE/SCIENCE WITH THEATER

Week 8: The creative process of fitting theater form to environmental science issues

Proposed readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Rosenblatt, R. (2000, April 26). All the Days of the Earth. *Time*. Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,996742,00.html>
- O Romeo, O Romeo: Where is Water Pollution? (2009) Ventura's Environment: City of Ventura. Available at: Part I <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzzKds1yy3Y> and Part II <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxNr77fpzQ8>

Proposed readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Bagley, K. (2009, November 19). boom boosts science theatre. *The Scientist - Magazine*. Available at: <http://classic.the-scientist.com/blog/display/56157/>

In-class workshops:

- MONDAY: Group scripting session I
- WEDNESDAY: Group scripting session II

Assignment:

- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Draft of group performance piece script, design ideas, etc.
- Group project
- Reflection portfolio
- Course readings as required

Week 9: In-class workshops for scripting, set and prop design, costume design, presentation preparation, etc.

- Group project
- Reflection portfolio

Week 10: Presentation of dress rehearsal for group productions

- **DUE MONDAY AND WEDESDAY**: Group performance/production and discussions

Finals Week:

- **DUE TUESDAY OF FINALS WEEK**: Individual Weekly Journal and Reflection Portfolio