

Fundamentals of Acting

Winter 2007

Instructor: **D. Ohlandt**

Office: Theatre Arts Dept. Office

Phone: [337]-7127 (email is preferred)

email: **dohlandt@kzoo.edu**

TTh 12:40pm - 2:30pm

Dungeon Theatre

office hours: Tu *by appointment*

W Th 2:30pm-4pm

Objectives:

Overall, to explore and practice the fundamental skills of stage acting.

1. To learn the basic philosophies of some of the most influential acting teachers in contemporary Euro-American traditions.
2. To practice and demonstrate playing an objective while acting in a scene and a monologue.
3. To learn, through discussion as well as experience, basic stage terminology and orientation.
4. To participate in a learning/performance ensemble consisting of your class, learning from and with your classmates.
5. To learn and practice basic textual analysis as actors apply it to dramatic works.
6. To learn and practice basic movement and voice exercises in order to break habits of everyday moving and speaking.

Texts:

The following required books are available at the K College Bookstore:

- a 5x5 quad, side-bound notebook (please buy and use the one from the bookstore)
- *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*, by Bruder, et al.
- *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, by Richard Brestoff.
- *All My Sons*, by Arthur Miller.
- *The Laramie Project*, by Moises Kaufman & the Tectonic Theatre Project.
- *Wit*, by Margaret Edson.

Attendance:

You are required to attend all class meetings, and to arrive on time, ready to work, and dressed appropriately to move and possibly get on the floor. You may bring water bottles with closeable tops. When you do not attend class, your partner cannot work and your classmates are deprived of your input. Attendance will be taken every day (tardies will be noted) and your attendance WILL impact your grade. **Five absences or more will result in automatic failure of class. Three late arrivals (or early departures) will equal one absence.**

In the event that you miss a graded scene presentation day, make-up credit will RARELY be accepted, only by arrangement in advance or for documented emergencies, at the discretion of the instructor. In the event that your scene partner misses a graded scene presentation day, you will be allowed to present your scene without penalty when they return.

Grading:

Classwork 60%

- performance of a "blank scene" with assigned objective
- performance of a two-person scene memorized verbatim, and hard photocopy of the scene with your acting notes (further instructions given in class)
- performance of a monologue from The Laramie Project memorized verbatim, and hard photocopy of the scene with your acting notes
- second, public performance of the *same* two-person scene, with improvements
- group presentation and demonstration from *Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*
- attendance, participation and preparation, including:
 - out-of-class preparation, as evidenced by your journal, your partner's journal, and your readiness for performance (*expect to spend a great deal of time rehearsing your scene and monologue outside of class on your own*)
 - in-class participation in discussion of texts and peer feedback on in-class work

Journal 25%

- actor's journal kept faithfully through the quarter, according to assignments

Written Work 15%

- TWO typed, 2-3 page written critiques of play performances - one from K College's Student Playwrighting Festival, and one from off-campus

Grading Standards:

- D or F = assignments not completed, not done according to instructions, or done late; excessive absences or tardies, failure to prepare or participate in class, inappropriate clothing for work (*note: failure to memorize– or to memorize verbatim– warrants a "D" or "F"*)
- C = assignments completed according to instructions; most classes attended; inconsistent preparation or quality of work
- B = assignments completed with evidence of growth, self-reflection, and dedicated effort; almost all classes attended; many insightful contributions to class discussion
- A = *consistently exceptional work* in all aspects of the class: performance, preparation, written work, growth, discussions, feedback to peers; perfect attendance and full participation; have set high standards for yourself and are driven to meet them

I do not grade performances on "talent," but rather on the specific skills that we are discussing and drilling in class. Your preparation and my evaluation of it may make more sense if you think of acting as learning a musical instrument, or as drilling in sports– once you "get" the technique we're working on, practice really will make you better. At a certain point, you will almost certainly have to take it on faith that a given acting skill can be learned and that it is worth learning. . . but if you are having trouble "getting it," come and talk to me. I believe that "getting it" in your head is as important as "getting it" in your body, and vice versa!

Special Accommodations: Everyone is built a little differently, and it shouldn't be surprising that everyone has different needs when it comes to learning in the classroom. I am happy to provide large-print copies of any materials that I hand out, and I can also make available written outlines of the things that I have prepared to say in class. If differences in your ability to see, hear, or learn require more elaborate aids than this– if, for example, you need outlines of what everyone else says in class– then you will need to alert me before the end of week 1, and you will also need to arrange for services through the college.

If you have concerns about mobility requirements for any assignment or physical access to the classroom, performance spaces, or any resources, please see me and we will work together to resolve the problem.

Journals:

You will be keeping a journal throughout the quarter. At various points, I will collect the journals, comment on them, and return them to you with a partial grade. Your journal must include notes you take in class, any assignments I give you as the quarter progresses, a descriptive record of *all* work you do outside of class on your scene or monologue, and reflections on your strengths, weaknesses, and progress.

- Bring your journal to class every day.
- DATE EVERY ENTRY and begin on a new page.
- When recording out-of-class rehearsal work, note what you did, when, where, AND what you think you discovered or achieved. Make connections to class discussions/readings.
- Respond to assigned readings and any supplementary reading you've done on your own.
- Be sure to write down and then complete any specific assignments I give you for your journal.
- When your peers are giving graded performances in class, you should carefully record constructive responses to their work.

Group Presentation & Demonstration:

In groups of 3, students will introduce to the class a particular school of acting from the book *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*. Each presentation must include:

- additional background information on the teacher and style in question
- some kind of visual material that helps to understand how this style is used (can be video clips, charts, diagrams, programs, etc.). Your group is responsible for securing any necessary A/V equipment.
- a demonstration (involving the whole class) of at least one exercise described in the book as part of this particular approach to acting
- a guided discussion to help your classmates process their experiences in the exercise, as well as the technique's significance to contemporary acting

At least 24 hours before the class it is due, your group MUST turn in to me an outline of your presentation, with your sources identified in MLA style. An email attachment is acceptable (but text in the email message is not).

Your group must arrange to meet with Dr. Ohlandt in person the week before your presentation, but be aware I am not on campus Mondays or Fridays. (I will need to make special arrangements with Group #1.)

Written Play Critiques:

For each show, you must write a 2-3 page, typed, double-spaced critique, focusing on the acting. One of your two critiques must address ONE play from K's Senior Performance Series (Th-S week 6) or K's Student Playwrighting Festival (Th-S week 8). There will be many short plays and staged readings in the SPF, in addition to the two senior-produced plays in week 6. Choose one that you saw and discuss it. Your second critique must be from an off-campus production; see Theatre Kalamazoo guide for suggestions. Check with Dr. Ohlandt if you are unsure if a performance is appropriate.

These critiques must demonstrate correct grammar and punctuation, coherent organization of ideas, and connection to the ideas and skills covered in class. *Critiques are due at the beginning of the first class after show is closed.* Email attachments (in .rtf, .pdf, Word, or WordPerfect) will be accepted, but inline text of an email will NOT. Assignments turned in or emailed after class begins are late. Late assignments will be penalized.

Dressing for Class:

- wear comfortable clothing that permits free and flexible movement
- keep your eyes visible: tie long hair back from face and take off hats
- be prepared to take your shoes off at any given class
- be prepared to sit, crawl, and slide on the floor at any given class

Mandatory Public Performance of Scenes:

Week 10 Wednesday, 6-9pm

If you cannot make this ENTIRE time commitment, drop this course now.

Guests are welcome and encouraged to this performance.

Audition Workshop:

Week 9 Tuesday, in class

This is a special opportunity to work with the second class in the K College acting sequence, *Developing A Character*, taught by Karen Berthel. For this workshop, we will get to sit on the "director's" side of the casting table, select scenes for the *Developing A Character* students to read cold, and make decisions about who to "cast" and why in one or more of the plays we are reading for this class.

Staged Reading for the Student Playwriting Festival:

The best way to get better at acting is to do it!

As part of the Student Playwriting Festival, Dr. Ohlandt will be directing students from this Fundamentals of Acting class in a staged reading of a one-act written by a K Student, Curtis Varouh, who is currently in Japan. The play is called *Rigor Mortis*, and we will need 3 men and 3 women to participate.

Rehearsals will take place outside of class, probably in the evenings. This will not be a full rehearsal (we may only meet 4 or 5 times), and we will meet according to our joint availability.

No memorization is required, but actors will practice reading the script aloud so that they are comfortable with the dialogue. In a staged reading, one actor reads aloud all the stage directions so that the audience has a sense of what is going on.

On Week 8 Tuesday, we will perform our staged reading in class and get feedback from our peers.

Requirements to participate:

- technical rehearsals with the crew and other plays in SPF: Feb 17 - Feb 21 (week 7-8)
 - if you have an unavoidable conflict during this time, please do not volunteer to participate
- performances: Feb 22 - 25 (Thursday through Sunday of Week 8)
 - the staged readings will be performed on Friday night (8pm) and Saturday afternoon (4pm), and possibly Saturday evening (8pm) as well

Extra credit will be available to those who participate in this project. Please contact Dr. Ohlandt ASAP if you are interested. Your in-class work will serve as your audition.