

ENGL 89.5

WRITING FOR THE PUPPET STAGE

A FIRST YEAR SEMINAR

“The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.”

---W.B. Yeats

INSTRUCTOR: Marianne Gingher

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Class meets: Greenlaw 317, T/TR 11-12:15 (workshop time available to students immediately following class, in my office, 12:30—1:30, T/TR)

Professor Gingher's regular office hours: Tuesday AND Thursday 3:30-5 and most Wednesdays 11-3:30 (Space is limited to 3 students per hour for puppet construction, so make an appointment!)

WHAT IS THIS COURSE ABOUT?

Playwriting and Puppetry emphasizes puppetry arts as an expression of literary craft, and offers the student an immersive experience in writing, designing, and producing a theatrical project from initial concept to writing and execution. The course breaks new ground in that puppetry arts have never had a significant presence on the UNC campus. The goals of the class are to offer students a writing-intensive course (similar to playwriting) but with a hands-on *experiential* and *collaborative* component; to provide guidance in basic scene, plot, and character development, culminating in dramatic scripts acted by puppets; to explore a simple but importantly strategic question: *Why puppets instead of actors?* Hand puppetry (including glove, stick, and rod puppets—as well as masks) will be the vehicles for expression, and scripting puppet entertainments will be presented both as a craft to be learned and as an art to be experienced.

WHAT WE WILL IMAGINE and WRITE

- Short Dramatic Scenes for 2-4 puppets (solo and collaborative assignments)
- A dramatization based entirely on gesture, in which something discernibly significant happens between two puppets
- A dialogue between the puppeteer (masked) and one puppet (solo)
- The 10 minute 1 Act Play for 3-5 puppets (solo, duo, or trio)

The class will be divided into **THREE Theater Companies**. In lieu of a written exam, each company will perform a 25 minute show of its best (revised) work. We'll perform the shows over the last two days of the term, followed by a

critique. ON OUR SCHEDULED EXAM DAY, we'll perform the shows (AND, HOPEFULLY, FILM THEM) a final time for an audience!!!!

WHAT WE WILL READ:

Strings, Hands, Shadows: A Modern Puppet History, by John Bell; Art Institute of Detroit (used copies are available from Amazon—order immediately);
Making Puppets Come Alive: How to Learn and Teach Hand Puppetry, by Larry Engler and Carol Fijan, Dover Publications;
A variety of materials posted on Sakai (under Resources)
Assorted hand-outs

WHAT WE WILL BUILD:

Simple puppets (stick, rod, paper, sock or any variety of mouth puppets, paper mache-headed puppets or “anything” puppets), masks, “crankies” (optional)

Cardboard and foam board props, scenery, stages as needed

Emphasis is on FOUND and recyclable materials. I will load up my office (214 Greenlaw) with all sort of stuff and beginning in September my office will be a resource center for help, brainstorming, books to thumb through, and puppet making between the **hours of 12:30—2 and 3:30-4:30 on T/R and most Wednesdays between 11-3. Don't be shy, come on by!** Much of your puppet building will take place on your own time using Maker's Space resources, found materials, and materials you cull from my office. Each Theater Company will have a plastic storage bin and filing cabinet drawer in my office for stashing completed puppets and props, but once the space is filled, puppeteers will need to store items in their own spaces.

WHAT WE WILL SEE

- *A performance of Paperhand Puppet Intervention in the Forest Theater
- *Videos related to the art and craft of puppet theater
- *Guest visitors discussing puppetry/writing/improvisation/stagecraft
- *And, hopefully, students will develop an eye for **seeing** the artistic possibilities in junk as we become “makers.”

OTHER REQUIREMENTS:

ORAL REPORTS (collaborative) on topics relating to puppetry (a list will be provided) The presentation should be accompanied by a hard-copy of bullet points that gives evidence of at least **THREE** sources consulted for gathering information *other* than Wikipedia. Provide visuals as needed (hand-outs, demonstrations, artwork, power point, etc.) Presentations should be brief, but specific: about 10-15 minutes.

HOW YOU WILL BE EVALUATED?

The Honor Code:

The honor code applies to everything that you—and I—do at this university, including our use of outside sources in our research and writing. Our work in this class will conform to the principles and procedures defined in the *Instrument of Student Judicial Governance* (<http://instrument.unc.edu/>). The research that we do this semester, whether primary or secondary, print or online, formal or informal, will require careful documentation on your part. If I suspect you of plagiarizing all or part of a CREATIVE PROJECT, even unintentionally, I am required to report the offense to the Honor Court.

All assignments will have deadlines. Failure to complete assignments on time will result in a diminishment of that assignment's grade. In a collaborative class such as this one, your loyal attendance and vigorous participation are required, NOT optional! Individual absences are limited to TWO per semester. If you miss more than TWO CLASSES, you must provide a note from a medical clinician. More than four absences and you are in danger of failing the class.

BREAKDOWN OF SEMESTER CREDIT:

- 10% ORAL REPORTS on puppetry topic of your choice.
- 35% 3-4 short dramatic scene SCRIPTS for 2-4 puppets (@10% each);
There will be prompts for each scene writing assignment
- 20% Construction of 4 objects: one glove puppet/two masks/ one “anything” puppet); **ONE** of these creations must have some ability to “move” its mouth, or roll its eyes, or stick out its tongue, or elongate its neck—something surprising. How you decide to build it is your option entirely. **You are required to attend Maker's Space orientation and receive training in the technologies that you're most interested in and that will help you achieve your goals as a maker of puppets. ONE of your “built” puppets should incorporate a technology available at Makers Space (laser cutter, 3-D printer, sewing machines, etc.).**
- 15 % A 10-minute ONE ACT PLAY, based on a memoir OR an original imaginative drama for 3 to 5 puppets. This is a COLLABORATIVE project with assistance from your Theater Company members. The ONE ACT PLAY should include, besides its cast of puppets 1) Scenery 2) Props or masks as needed, 3) sound effects and music
- 20% FINAL SHOW (with revised scripts, finished puppets and scenery/props, program notes, etc.) The final performance will showcase each individual Theater Company's best work of the semester and serve as the final exam for this course.

MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION:

Q: *How will my progress in the class be assessed? Writing scripts and making puppets and learning how to perform with them seem like skills that can't be evaluated in traditional ways (like math or biology tests). What must I do to make an A or a B in this course?*

A: Puppetry can be a literary art, but it is primarily a visual one. As an art form it has as much—or more-- in common with mime and spectacle and dance as it does scripted theater. We'll strive to immerse ourselves in the multimedia fusion of it all. We'll learn basic scene writing techniques, basic elements and principles of design, basic puppet construction techniques, and a bit about "voicing" puppets and manipulating them. I hope to inspire your imaginations by providing you examples of exceptional puppetry I've archived on video. **This is chiefly a course in storytelling by using puppets.** **Paying close attention to the world around you**, rich with sources of inspiration, is key. **Patience** is key. Not every idea will be workable nor every script (or puppet) successfully realized. But failure followed by resilience (and revision) is more often than not the underpinning of success. **Community** is what we're building here and supportive collaboration with your fellow puppeteers will be key. There are no totally right or totally wrong ways to write and perform puppet plays. There are only *better* ways, and how you go about discovering and implementing those better ways will be my guide in evaluating your progress. For specifics, please see the document posted on Sakai: ASSESSMENT IN ENGL 089.

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First Six Weeks (Aug 20-Sept 26)

During the first six weeks of the semester, we'll dig into learning as much about puppets (history, craft) and writing (short dramatic scenes for puppets) as time allows. We'll workshop what we write and acquire basic puppet manipulation skills. We'll also begin to *MAKE* puppets (glove puppets/masks/stick puppets/anything puppets). Students will be expected to complete Maker's Space orientation and training in technologies they hope to access that will facilitate the material creation portion of this course. Also, reports on various aspects of and contributors to puppet arts will be presented during this time frame. Two students will research and present each topic with audio visuals. Reports should last about 10-15 minutes.

Second Six Weeks (Oct. 1—Nov.7)

During the second six weeks of the term we'll be discussing tabletop puppetry (as one performance option), set design, use of props, and voicing of puppets. We'll have several guest speakers. Students will complete drafts of a short imaginative drama (collaboration for two-three) and construct prototypes of puppets. Each duo or trio will present a rough draft of a 10 minute playlet and "pitch" ideas for staging and script refinement to the class. Members of theater companies may help as needed with production and performance. This is when teamwork will be most appreciated (and in some cases, necessary).

Final Three Weeks (Nov. 12-December 3)

During these final weeks, each Theater Company will plan, rehearse, and tweak content (based on its members' BEST writing and puppet design) of a short cabaret, lasting no longer than 20-25 minutes. The cabaret will include short and longer dramatizations, depending on what each Company selects as the most outstanding or representational work of its members. Dress rehearsals will take place on Tues., Nov. 26 and on Tuesday, December 3rd, with the final performance scheduled during our exam period.

WEEKS ONE AND TWO

THE BASICS/ WRITING DRAMATIC SCENES/WHAT IS A PUPPET?

AUG 20/ Introductions, syllabus, a brief bio; fill out Questionnaire, video clip Charlie Chaplin's "Roll Dance" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DLdMa98JdM>
Handouts. "Soap Opera" by Sarah Nolan Some words about Attention/Patience/Community & the value of Workshop critiques

For NEXT CLASS: Read tiny stories "The Moth and the Star" by James Thurber and "Crazy Glue," by Etgar Kerat, "Snow" by Julia Alvarez, and "The Stones" (all four stories are either posted on Sakai or provided as handouts); Also, read Annie Dillard's essay excerpt on "Seeing" from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. ALSO: ORDER OR BUY YOUR COURSE MATERIALS! ALSO: Familiarize yourselves with our SYLLABUS!

AUG 22 DISCUSSION of the stories previously assigned focusing on *elements of dramatic scene in FICTION vs. PLAYWRITING*. Discussion of fictional scene hand out and it's dramatic script counterpart. What are the differing considerations of both forms? The collaborative dependency of playmakers vs. the solo fiction writer. Tabletop/ Stop-Motion Puppetry film of Etgar Kerat's "Crazy Glue."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpcTPHdjhK0>

FOR NEXT CLASS: EXERCISE #1 Make a "SELFIE" mask of yourself; Based on the short autobiography you wrote in class, adapt elements of the autobiography into song lyrics or a poem and come to class prepared to don

your mask and *sing* or recite to us an introduction to who you are. (See handout or posting on Sakai)

AUG 27

Masked Performances of Autobiographies

Hand-out sheet of report topics for students to consider

Theater Group Assignments

FOR NEXT CLASS: Read Chapters 1 and 2 in *Strings, Hands, Shadows: A Modern Puppet History* (henceforth referred to as *SHS*), pp. 7-35; ALSO read in *Making Puppets Come Alive (MPCA)* pp. 11-51.

AUG 29

Receive simple hand puppet and kazoo

Exercises in “getting to know” your puppets

View short film “Poor Chester” by Sarah Nolan

“Boney” by Deb Seabrooke of Jabberbox Puppet Theater

“Baby Cage” by Daniel Wallace

Discuss aspects of these very different performances

SIGN UP FOR REPORTS*****

FOR NEXT CLASS: EXERCISE #2 COLLABORATION (Minimal dialogue exercise)

With one other person, co-write a 2-3-page (double-spaced) SCENE between 2 characters in which the repetition of a word is useful in conveying the point of the scene. You may use other words, but allow one word or phrase to have thematic significance. OR write a scene for two in which each character uses one word over and over in varying ways that distinguishes them from one another, suggesting a conflict. Make 3 copies for class use on Tuesday.

*****Practice your scene before you come to class.**

ALSO: READ pp. 54-86 in *MPCA*—and practice what the authors preach!

WEEKS THREE AND FOUR

PREMISE and CHARACTERIZATION

SEPT 3: Perform collaborative Minimal dialogue with faceless glove puppets. Class critique/discussion focusing on “premise” and “characterization.” DISCUSS what makes a good premise and the development of character out of conflict/situation.

FOR NEXT CLASS: Read in *SHS*, pp. 37-80 (Chapters 3, 4); HAND-OUT on *Elements of Dramatic Writing* for you to read and consider.

Finish performances of Minimal Dialogue Scenes

SEPT. 5: Finish Puppet Scene Performances; Introduction (from Aesop’s “Hunter and the Lion”) to illustrate next writing assignment.

FOR NEXT CLASS: Read in *SHS*, Chapter 5, pp. 81-96, “The Second Wave of Puppet Modernism”; 2 REPORT PRESENTATIONS; Demonstration: Making an “Anything” puppet from common source materials; EXERCISE #3

(Collaboration for two—or may be solo): Power discrepancy between two

puppets of varying size (see hand-out or Sakai for details of assignment) This assignment requires you to make another mask --or a stick puppet-- bigger than the smaller hand puppet you will use. The goal is to write a scene that emphasizes differences between them.

SEPT. 10: 2 Report PRESENTATIONS ***
Performances of Exercise #3**

FOR NEXT CLASS: Read final Chapter 6 in SHS, pp. 97-110

SEPT. 12: Performances of Exercise #3 and critique

FOR NEXT CLASS: There will be a papier mache demonstration.

- ALSO: EXERCISE #4 Write a scene enacted by two puppets that communicates a simple story *without any words*. Set the scene to appropriate music. The scene should be brief—no longer than 2-3 minutes. Practice it with 2 puppets before you come to class, referring to *MPCA*, to hone manipulation skills.**

SEPT. 17: Paper Mache demonstration/ making a head for your glove puppet Performances, with music, of Exercise#4

FOR NEXT CLASS: 2 REPORT PRESENTATIONS

Finish reviewing EXERCISE #4

SEPT. 19 : 2 Reports*****

Exercise #4 demonstrations

Putting a glove puppet together tutorial

FOR NEXT CLASS:

2 Reports

Glove Puppet tutorial

Luman Coad video on puppet manipulation, if time permits

SEPT. 24: 1 Report*****

Glove Puppet Workshop

Luman Coad and puppet manipulation

FOR NEXT CLASS:

2 REPORTS

Continue to work on your glove puppet

EXERCISE #5 With one other person, write a scene for 2 puppets in which one will be voiced entirely with a kazoo and the other will have spoken lines. Be sure to contrast the MOODS of the puppets to demonstrate contrast. [See specific directions]

SEPT. 26: 2 REPORTS*****

Presentation of FINISHED GLOVE PUPPET (can be used to perform Exercise #5—or use a faceless puppet or anything puppet)

EXERCISE #5 PERFORMANCES

NEXT CLASS: #5 Performances

2 REPORTS; Read handout of “My Shit Job” (adapted for puppetry from a story by Daniel Wallace)

- OCT. 1: 2 REPORTS*****
5 Performances finish/ critiques
***Possible GUEST/ The Scene As a Complete Story
Short Video “My Shit Job” based on a story by Daniel Wallace**
- OCT. 3: “UNLEASHED” a video of a
Show, complete with MISTAKES!!!!
NEXT CLASS: By this date you must have completed Maker’s Space
trainings.
Lecture: MEMOIR or IMAGINATIVE TALE as Tabletop Puppetry
The Narrative; Premise, Characterization, Conflict. Synopsis; Story
Boards; Cause-and-Effect; Surprising yourself (why revision
works)
MAY HAVE GUEST**
- OCT. 10 The BIG PROJECT; Possible guest, Assorted handouts; You must
have completed your Maker’s Space Orientation and training
session(s) by this date!!!!
NEXT CLASS: We will not meet October 14—21. Use your extra time
to WRITE your 10-minute plays (either solo --or collaboratively
with one partner). Make prototypes of puppets. BRING all element
of this first draft effort (see
handout) to class on OCTOBER 22 and be prepared to have a read-
through/performance of your play and workshop discussion . Make
six copies of your play, one for me and 5 for your Theater Company
members. We will begin reading, workshopping, acting and
brainstorming each play OCT 22.**
- OCT. 22 10-Minute Play Workshop (2-3 plays)**
- OCT. 24 10-Minute Play Workshop (2-3plays)**
- OCT. 29 10-Minute Play Workshop (2-3 plays)**
- Oct. 31 10-Minute Play Workshop (2-3 plays)**
- Nov. 5 10-Minute Play Workshop (2-3 plays)**
- Nov. 7 Completion of puppets and Props and Revision of Plays
Discussion of Final Cabaret and Theater Companies’ Selections
Reperformances of Revised sketches, scenes, Plays**
- Nov. 12 Reperformances of revisions**
- Nov. 14 Revisions, staging considerations, Theater Companies select
Cabaret numbers**

Nov. 19 Rehearse Shows/Critiques

Nov. 21 Rehearse Shows/Critiques

Nov. 26 Dress Rehearsal

Dec. 3 Dress Rehearsal

FINAL EXAM DATE TBA

Final Exam will consist of a public performance of all three Theater Companies' 25-Minute Shows