

ENGL 435

THE PLAY OF IDEAS

PROF. CHRISTOPHER GROBE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ideas don't just exist; they happen. They aren't just mental abstractions; they are forces that act directly upon our daily lives. This course draws on a wide variety of plays to ask:

- What is a "play of ideas"? How can we "play with ideas"?
- When and why does thought become theatrical?
- What does it matter how an idea is performed?

READINGS:

Starred readings on the course schedule below will appear in our course packet
All others are available at Amherst Books

Ibsen, *Four Major Plays* (Oxford, 2008)
Shaw, *George Bernard Shaw's Plays*, 2nd ed. (Norton, 2002)
Shaw, *Heartbreak House* (Penguin, 2001)
Brecht, *The Good Person of Szechwan* (Penguin, 2008)
Kushner & Tesori, *Caroline or Change* (TCG, 2004)
Sondheim & Weidman, *Assassins* (TCG, 1993)
The TEAM, *Mission Drift* (Oberon, 2015)
Lee, *We're Gonna Die* (TCG, 2015)
Van Itallie, *The Serpent* (Dramatists Play Service, 1998)
Churchill, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (TCG 1997)
Wolfe, *The Colored Museum* (Grove, 1988)
Lee, *The Shipment and Lear* (TCG, 2010)
Jacobs-Jenkins, *Appropriate and Other Plays* (TCG, 2016)

REQUIREMENTS:

- Active participation
- Two short essays
- In-class presentations (introducing on-syllabus material; bringing in off-syllabus material)
- Final project (research proposal and annotated bibliography)

COURSE SCHEDULE

PLAYING WITH IDEAS

T Jan 26 Opening Discussion

THE LECTURE

Th Jan 28 *Goffman, "The Lecture" from *Forms of Talk*
*Heller, "Listen and Learn" from *The New Yorker* (7/9/2012)
WATCH: selected Onion Talks (links by e-mail)

THE DEBATE

T Feb 2 **Oxford Union Rough Guide to Debating*
WATCH: Baldwin & Buckley debate at the Cambridge Union
<https://youtu.be/oFeoS41xe7w>

THE (TEACHER-CENTERED?) DISCUSSION: SOCRATIC DIALOGUE & LITERARY SEMINAR

Th Feb 4 *Goldstein, *Plato at the Googleplex* (excerpt)
*Plato, *Crito*
*Showalter, *Teaching Literature* (excerpt)
WATCH: "The Art of Discussion Leading"
<https://vimeo.com/104311202>

THE (PARTICIPANT-CENTERED?) DISCUSSION: HARKNESS & CR

T Feb 9 Explore Phillips Exeter Academy website on The Harkness Method:
http://www.exeter.edu/admissions/109_1220.aspx
*Gornick, "Consciousness" from *NY Times Magazine* (1/10/71)
*Kalčík, "... like Ann's gynecologist or the time I was almost raped"
*Langellier & Peterson, "Spinstorying"

W Feb 10 Autoethnographic Essay due by 5:00pm (2-3 pgs.)
Describe one way you have done ideas (or seen them done) at Amherst.

Th Feb 11 Discuss essays and conclude the unit

THE PLAY OF IDEAS (MODERN DRAMA)

T Feb 16 Ibsen, *A Doll House*
*Shaw, "The Technical Novelty in Ibsen's Plays"
Th Feb 18 Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*
T Feb 23 Ibsen, *Ghosts*

Th Feb 25	*Wilde, <i>A Woman of No Importance</i>
T Mar 1	*Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" & "The Critic as Artist" (excerpts)
Th Mar 3	Shaw, <i>Major Barbara</i>
T Mar 8	*Chekhov, <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>
Th Mar 10	Shaw, <i>Heartbreak House</i>
Su Mar 13	Critical Essay due by 5:00pm (5-6 pgs.) <i>Contribute to our collective definition of the (modernist) "play of ideas."</i>

*******SPRING BREAK*******

THE MUSICAL OF IDEAS

T Mar 22	Brecht, <i>The Good Person of Szechwan</i>
Th Mar 24	Kushner & Tesori, <i>Caroline or Change</i>
T Mar 29	Sondheim & Weidman, <i>Assassins</i>
Th Mar 31	Christian, Gancher & the TEAM, <i>Mission Drift</i>
T Apr 5	*The Civilians, <i>Gone Missing</i>
Th Apr 7	Lee, <i>We're Gonna Die</i>

THE (DEVISED) PLAY OF IDEAS

T Apr 12	Jean-Claude van Itallie & Open Theatre, <i>The Serpent</i>
Th Apr 14	Caryl Churchill & Joint Stock, <i>Light Shining in Buckinghamshire</i>
	Attend 8:00pm performance of <i>Collidescope 2.0</i> at UMass
T Apr 19	Discuss <i>Collidescope 2.0: Adventures in Pre- and Post-Racial America</i>
Th Apr 21	Rude Mechanicals, <i>Stop Hitting Yourself</i>

FROM THE #FERGUSON THEATRE SYLLABUS

T Apr 26	Wolfe, <i>The Colored Museum</i>
Th Apr 28	*Parks, <i>The Death of the Last Black Man...</i>
T May 3	Lee, <i>The Shipment</i>
Th May 5	Jacobs-Jenkins, <i>Appropriate</i>