

# English 131: Poetry and Drama

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Office Hours MW 1:30-3:30,  
Colson 329

“Poetry makes nothing happen ...”

– W. H. Auden, from *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*

“It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species.”

--Samuel Beckett, from *Waiting for Godot*

English 131 offers an introduction to poetic and dramatic forms. We'll read a diverse range of poems and plays; examine their social and structural aspects; and compose thoughtful responses comprised of analysis, argument, invention and/or performance.

To begin, we'll look into poet W.H. Auden's assertion that “poetry makes nothing happen.” It's a line from one of his poems that is often taken out of context (I'm doing it right now, see?). If it's true that poetry doesn't *make* anything happen, doesn't force people into feeling, thinking or acting a certain way, then what *does* it do? We'll ask the same question of drama – is the famously minimalist writer Samuel Beckett correct to suggest that when we stand around thinking “with folded arms,” we are “no less a credit to our species” than anyone else, than those, for example, who rush out into the world to *make* happen concrete, observable things?

Some people dedicate their entire professional lives to writing poetry or drama; others devote a semester to reading a handful of texts for an English class. Both groups are doing work, and by examining poetry and drama in their social, personal and rhetorical contexts, we'll do our best to figure out what kind of work that is (and hopefully find it worth doing).

history is

history is **doomed to repeat itself**

history is **written by the victors**

history is **fun**

history is **made at night**

Press Enter to search.

every person is a playwright because

every person is a **playwright** because

every person is a **new door to a different world**

every person is **afraid of the drones**

every person is **an island**

i write for |

i write for **apples**

i write for **myself**

i write for **fear of silence**

i write for **myself and strangers**

Press Enter to search.

# Course Materials

- Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry: an Introduction and Anthology* 0312463197
- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 0230217877
- Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* 0802132758
- Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 080214442X
- Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf* 0684843269



**Print copies** of course texts are required; no e-texts. In addition to the books listed, a very few additional readings will be made available to you on blackboard. These must be printed out as well and brought to class. If you come to class without your text, you will lose participation points for the day – 1/2 credit for quizzes or in-class activities. Again, **no e-texts**.

## Participation

Participation points are earned through in-class exercises, group discussion assignments, reading quizzes and other activities given during class. In addition, **I will keep track of your verbal participation**, awarding 3 points every week (~45 points of the total 150 points reserved for class participation) to students who contribute substantially to class discussion. This is a big class, but we meet 3 days a week; speak up at least once per week and stay engaged in the discussion during the entire week (that means staying alert and off your phone), and you'll likely receive full credit.

## Attendance & Make-Up Policies

I'll take roll to learn names, but I impose no additional penalties for missing class other than the participation points you'll lose for missing in-class work. I don't need to see any doctor's notes or other excuses, unless you know you'll be absent for an entire week or during an exam.

Exams can be made up/rescheduled in special circumstances (e.g. school-sponsored trips, Days of Special Concern), but quizzes and verbal participation can never be made up. At semester's end, I will drop the lowest in-class exercise grade. Some in-class writing exercises may be made up. By all means ask me if you missed an exercise and want to know if you can make it up; just avoid asking, "did I miss anything when I was absent?" The answer to that question is always *Yes, you missed class*.

## Coursework

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Class Participation           | 150 |
| Oral Recitation               | 50  |
| Response Paper, Poetry        | 200 |
| Performance + Response, Drama | 300 |
| Midterm Exam                  | 150 |
| Final Exam                    | 150 |

## Grading Scale

Assignments add up to a total of 1000 points. Convert point totals into percentages, and the letter grade equivalents are:

A=90-100; B=80-89; C=70-79;  
D=60-69; F=0-59

## Assignment Descriptions

### Oral Recitation

Memorize a poem from the textbook and recite it for the class. Your performance will be evaluated according to the criteria adapted from the Judges Guide for [Poetry Out Loud](#).

### Response Paper, Poetry

Write a paper (1500 words) that responds to the Auden quotation included in the Course Description. Use the course texts as your primary evidence for your response. (*more detailed guidelines TBA*)

### Group Performance, Drama

In groups of 3-4, adapt and perform a scene from one of the course texts. You'll have 3 options: 1) the Rosencrantz & Guildenstern (stage a scene from the pov of a minor character); 2) the anti-Beckett (un-minimalize a scene by adding beaucoup props!); 3) the choreopoem (choose a poem from Vendler's anthology and work it into Shange's *For Colored Girls ...*). You'll write individual reflections about your group's process and performance. (detailed guidelines for all options TBA)

### Midterm and Final

Sit for exams that test your knowledge of and ability to analyze course texts.

# Course Outcomes

This course fulfills **GEC Objective 5, Artistic Expression**: Apply methods and principles of critical inquiry to the analysis of literary or artistic expression.



## Laptop Policy

Put away laptops and smartphones during class. If you can't resist the temptation to check these devices, you may lose participation points.

## Academic Dishonesty

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

## Accommodations

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (304-293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see

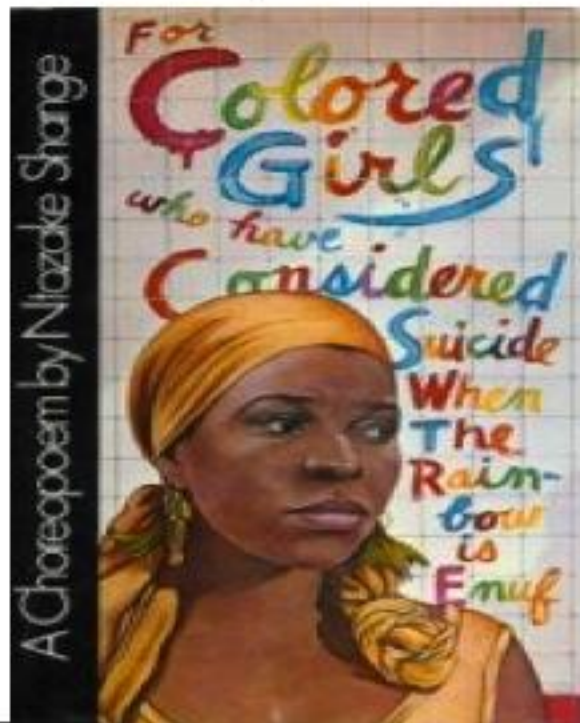
<http://diversity.wvu.edu/>.



## Teaching Philosophy and a Note about Sensitive Material

One of my main goals as a teacher is to present English studies as a dynamic, dramatic, social activity. I will encourage you to focus not on discovering THE truth in the literature we study, but on navigating the complex contexts that surround the literature. Often the most meaningful analysis comes out of conversations that, though they may not end in clear consensus, exercise our critical thinking and enhance our engagement with, and understanding of, how people actually communicate in the world. I will do my best to steer this class in the direction of relevant, engaging discussion.

That said, students should note that this course may contain some material that is sexually explicit, politically controversial, or religiously sensitive. In addition, there may be readings and works of art that include sexual content, graphic language or violence. The purpose of the course is to engage intellectually with all these matters, in an academic framework of scholarly inquiry. While all are encouraged to respect the diverse sensibilities in the classroom, discussions may be frank. If such content is a concern for you, you may wish to consider registering for another course.



## Non-Discrimination

This class does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, disability, or veteran status. Alternative viewpoints are welcome; however, statements deemed racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, or otherwise discriminatory toward others in or outside the class will not be tolerated.

### HOW NOT TO HAVE TO DRY THE DISHES

If you have to dry the dishes  
(Such an awful, boring chore)  
If you have to dry the dishes  
('Steed of going to the store)  
If you have to dry the dishes  
And you drop one on the floor—  
Maybe they won't let you  
Dry the dishes anymore.



# SYLLABUS, poetry

8/17 Course Introduction

*Poetry creates a space for reflection or clarity*

8/19 Poem as Life (3-8), Daddy (21), Flash Cards (24), Theme for English B (19)

8/21 Poem as Arranged Life (27-51)

8/24 13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird (604)

8/26 Poets on Poetry (307-320); a poem, "Talking Back (To WH Auden)"; an article, also [talking back to Auden](#)

*Poetry draws together the personal & political*

8/28 Constructing a Self (179-196); The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock (201)

8/31 Poetry and Social Identity (213-227); Reservation Love Song (371)

9/2 History and Regionality (239-253); America (471)

9/4 & 9/7 NO CLASS

9/9 Writing About Poetry (323-340); revisit Auden

*Poetry moves with the force of its language*

9/11 Poem as Pleasure (77-99), Why I Am Not a Painter (548)

9/14 Play of Language (153-167)

9/16 Banned Poems (TBA)

*Poetry advertises/validates ideas, feelings, cultural narratives*

9/18 Attitudes, Values, Judgments (281-290)

9/21 Poems in ads: Ozymandias (577), Song of Myself (627)

9/23 Google poems

9/25 Recitations

9/28 Recitations

9/30 Work in Class on Response Papers; **Outlines with Tentative Thesis due by end of class**

10/2 Midterm Review

**10/5 Midterm**

10/7 Work in Class on Response Papers

10/9 **Response papers due**

Intro to Drama

## SYLLABUS, drama

- 10/12 Fall Break  
10/14 William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 1  
10/16 Hamlet, Act 2  
  
10/19 Hamlet, Acts 3 & 4  
10/21 Hamlet, Act 5  
10/23 Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead  
  
10/26 Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead  
10/28 Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead  
10/30 Yasmina Reza, [The God of Carnage](#) (please print)  
  
11/2 Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot  
11/4 Waiting for Godot  
11/6 Waiting for Godot

- 11/9 Ntozake Shange, For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide, When the Rainbow is Enuf  
  
11/11 For Colored Girls cont.  
11/13 For Colored Girls cont.  
  
11/16 Work in class/Conference Day  
11/18 Work in class/Conference Day  
11/20 Group Performances

### **11/23 – 11/28 Break**

- 11/30 Group Performances  
12/2 Group Performances  
12/4 **Individual Performance**  
**Reflections due**  
  
**12/7 Final Exam Review**  
  
**12/10 Final Exam 11:00-1:00**