

# Diversity Theatre

## Course Syllabus

Instructor: Jeff Kaufman

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Course Description: A course in which students will learn about theatre and diverse cultures through dramatic works written by and about women, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Japanese-Americans, and LGBT persons.

Course Requirements: Students are expected to work well in groups reading scripts aloud. Students will demonstrate mastery of the course content through scene performance, art projects, and presentations to the class. Any scenes performed in class will be memorized and utilize basic props and costumes provided by the actors. Meaningful participation in class discussions of the issues raised in the plays studied will be mandatory.

### Plays Studied in Class:

- *Flyin' West* by Pearl Cleage
- *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kaufman et. al.
- *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez
- *And the Soul Shall Dance* by Wakako Yamauchi

*Flyin' West:* This play is set in the real-life town of Nicodemus, Kansas, a town settled by freed slaves after the Civil War. In the play, three African-American sisters struggle to live, thrive, and survive in the face of racism, sexism, and economic uncertainty. After studying the script, students will demonstrate mastery of the content by selecting scenes to perform for the class.

*The Laramie Project:* This play's script is composed entirely of transcripts of interviews with people affected by the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming. This tragic event was a turning point for gay rights in the United States. Students will demonstrate mastery of the content by creating an artistic collage and an artist's statement focused on one of the play's themes.

*Zoot Suit:* This "play with music" uses swing dance and big-band jazz to tell the story of the "Sleepy Lagoon Murder" and the "Zoot Suit Riots" in Los Angeles during World War II, in which Mexican-American youth were vilified by the press, incarcerated unfairly by racist judges, and beaten in the streets by sailors in the U.S. Navy. Issues of gang membership and shifting ideas about Mexican-American/Chicano identity are major themes of the play. Students will demonstrate mastery of the content by creating an original storyboard and comparing it to the film adaptation of the play.

*And the Soul Shall Dance:* This play illuminates the world of immigrant Japanese-American farm workers in 1930s California. Japanese traditions and customs play major roles in the lives of the characters. An introduction to some simple Japanese foods will be a part of the lesson. After studying the script, students will demonstrate mastery of the content by selecting scenes to perform for the class.