

Department of English & Writing Studies

American Drama: Home Sweet Home

English 3490G 001
Winter 2025

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Office Hours: Mondays 1:30-3:30 and Thursdays 1:30-2:30 or by appointment

See office hour sign up sheet on Brightspace to sign up for an appointment.

Delivery type: in-person, synchronous

Antirequisite(s): English 2460F/G.

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020-1999 or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

This course will focus on the idea of home in the United States. The living room is perhaps the most ubiquitous of settings in American drama, but it is a complex space, a battleground upon which larger conflicts in American culture are staged. Derived from the eighteenth-century parlor (a room that was named after the French word *parler*), the living room's purpose in the twentieth century was to receive guests and support the moral growth of the family by encouraging discussion and self-improvement. The living room's emergence as the center of the middle-class household in the nineteenth century happened at the same time that theatre became a popular form of middle-class entertainment in the United States.

Over the course of the semester, we will read plays, novels, and secondary readings that will help us consider such questions as: how does the home define the concepts of work and leisure, male and female, old and new, poor and rich, foreign and domestic, public and private, reality and fantasy, comfort and danger? How are larger national or social ideologies (for example, the American dream or the concept of race) articulated through the home? What conflicts are staged in the home in different periods of American history? We will begin by analyzing meditations on twentieth-century American life by playwrights such as Thornton Wilder (*Our Town*) who began to use metatheatrical techniques to interrogate the notion of the American family. The other works on our reading list will allow us to analyze different genres and periods of

Department of English & Writing Studies

American theatre, including realism (*A Raisin in the Sun*), expressionism (*Death of a Salesman*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*), and postmodernism (*Appropriate*, *The Piano Lesson*). By the end of the course, students will have a strong introduction to some of the most influential playwrights in U.S. theatre and will be able to explain the importance of the home as a symbol of contested American values.

Course format: this is an in-person synchronous course.

Use of recordings: Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior permission of the instructor.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Identify dramatic traditions and texts in the US, noting their key literary characteristics, their historical period, their intellectual tradition, and their relation to each other
- Analyze dramatic texts, in both oral and written contexts, using appropriate textual evidence, literary and dramatic terms, scholarly criticism, historical contexts, and insights from class discussions
- Analyze how different elements of performance work in different productions; work in teams to produce a short performance for the class
- Conduct specialized research using library databases
- Display academic integrity in all research processes – i.e. demonstrate an awareness of how new knowledge is created in the discipline, cite sources ethically and transparently, acknowledge the ideas that are theirs and not theirs, and make that difference clear to their readers. Students will contribute to the larger research community as they create connections among researchers and themselves, and protect the ideas of others and of ourselves.
- Read, summarize and cite primary and secondary sources responsibly; use scholarly analyses of plays to situate ideas within the context of an existing critical discussion and generate new insights into texts and performances
- Develop an original, incisive, and unified argument using multiple scholarly sources in a longer research paper

Texts and Materials

Wilder, Thornton. *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*. Harper Perennial, 2013. ISBN 9780062280817. \$21.99

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. Penguin, 978-0140481341. \$20.99

Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. New Directions, ISBN 978-0811216029. \$20.35

Hansbery, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. Vintage, ISBN 978-0679755333. \$11.19

Department of English & Writing Studies

Albee, Edward. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Signet, . ISBN 978-0451158710. \$23.00
Wilson, August. *The Piano Lesson*. Plume, ISBN 978-0452265349. \$16.00
Jacobs-Jenkins, Brenden. *An Octoroon/Appropriate*. tcg, ISBN 978-1-55936-490-4. \$26.95

On reserve at the Film Library in the basement of AHB:

Our Town (Dir. Sam Wood, 1940)
Our Town (Dir. James Naughton, 2003)
Death of a Salesman (Dir. Volker Schlöndorff, 1985)
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (Dir. Mike Nichols, 1966)
A Streetcar Named Desire (Dir. Elia Kazan, 1951)

Available on *Criterion* database:

Our Town (Dir. Sam Wood, 1940)
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (Dir. Mike Nichols, 1966)
A Streetcar Named Desire (Dir. Elia Kazan, 1951)

Methods of Evaluation:

The final mark for the course will be arrived at as follows:

Class participation and engagement	10%
Quizzes and participation activities (best 6 of 9)	5%
Company presentation	10%
Short essay (5 pages)	20%
Research paper proposal	pass/fail
Research paper (8-10 pages)	30%
Final exam (cumulative)	25%

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Land acknowledgement:

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population.

Department of English & Writing Studies

Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

OWL Brightspace

Students are responsible for checking the course site on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. Students may access the OWL Brightspace Learner Support site for assistance: <https://brightspacehelp.uwo.ca/> For IT related issues, they may contact Western Technology Services Helpdesk directly: <https://wts.uwo.ca/helpdesk/>.

Technical Requirements

This course requires you to have a reliable high-speed internet connection and a computer that meets the technical requirements for writing online timed assessments. We will also be conducting in-class quizzes on Brightspace, which will require either a laptop or a phone to complete.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unacknowledged use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Google Translate, to create content that is submitted as one's own. In this course, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, ChatGPT...) is prohibited. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for **research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines**, and other materials used in **preparing assignments**. Students are expected to **retain** these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them. Assignments should reflect the students' own thoughts and independent written work. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible, ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking and independent inquiry, and allows them to produce original written contributions.

Attendance and illness policy

Attendance is mandatory in all classes. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

If there is a reason why you're not attending our class, please speak to me about it. The process for requesting academic accommodation on medical or other grounds is described in the "Accommodations" section near the end of this syllabus.

Department of English & Writing Studies

Please do not come to in-person class if you're feeling ill or can't pass a COVID-19 screening guideline. I will be giving students **one week's worth of grace days (2 classes) for attendance and participation per semester**, to accommodate illness. Students who are missing more than one class due to illness, or who are missing class on a day they would like to submit a position paper or complete their seminar presentation, should either apply for formal academic accommodations (in the case of a seminar) or submit their SMC for this class (in the case of additional absences beyond the grace day). Please consult a more comprehensive description below in assignment guidelines, as well as the Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs here: https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf. Students who demonstrate a pattern of routinely missing coursework due to self-reported COVID symptoms, and therefore do not demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes of the course, will not receive credit for the course.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Contact information

I will normally respond to emails within 48 hours. I'm happy to discuss your ideas anytime during office hours. I hold my office hours in my office, with the ability to hold them on Zoom from there. Please sign up for an appointment slot via the link provided under "Learner Resources" on OWL and indicate whether you want to come in-person or via Zoom. If you just want to drop by, please do, but understand that I'll have to attend to scheduled students first. If you can't attend my regularly-scheduled office hours, contact me and we can set up an appointment.

Department of English & Writing Studies

Class content

Our course readings and discussions will often focus on serious, difficult, and potentially challenging topics that may ask you to step out of your normal comfort zone. Almost every work on our syllabus depicts mature, provocative, or even deliberately offensive content of some kind, including racial epithets and racist ideology, depictions of trauma and gender-based violence, suicide, substance abuse, and forms of self-harm.

Readings and discussions might trigger strong feelings – anger, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, humor, and even boredom. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers' understanding of the readings. Nonetheless, we are all responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful, and I ask all students to come to class and participate in discussions in a spirit of empathy, intellectual curiosity, and honesty. Please be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom.

Please consider approaching me ahead of time if you'd like to be made aware of certain kinds of content or other information that would help you feel more able to appreciate the readings or class discussion. If you think a particular reading or topic might be especially challenging or unsettling, I encourage you to reach out to campus counselling services; if need be, your counsellor can contact me to discuss the situation.

Contingency plan for instructor illness

In the event that I fall ill and am unable to teach in-person, we may conduct that day's class as a synchronous online class over Zoom. The grading scheme will not change. In the event that online learning is required, a stable internet connection with working microphone and webcam will be required. If any changes in delivery format are necessary, I will communicate with you via Announcements on OWL to explain the new format for the class.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Academic integrity on OWL

All students are required to have completed the Centre for Teaching and Learning's Academic Integrity Tutorial. Any students who have not completed the tutorial from a previous 1000-level course must complete it by Jan. 20.

Participation and engagement

This class depends upon regular and active engagement and participation from all students: this involves reading the course texts carefully before class, preparing questions for class discussion, listening actively, responding thoughtfully to other students, and coming to office hours. **You must bring your assigned text to class** so that you can participate fully in our

Department of English & Writing Studies

discussions. Readings should be completed in their entirety before our first class on them, even if we're covering them over multiple days.

Your participation mark is designed to measure your attendance, participation, engagement with other students, and evidence of consistent preparation and active learning. Short in-class writing assignments may be given during the semester to ensure that all students are contributing to the conversation. Failure to come to class prepared enough to ask a question, complete an in-class assignment, or participate in a discussion will negatively affect your participation grade.

Quizzes and participation assignments

Over the course of the year, I'll be giving 9 quizzes and/or short-answer assignments that are meant to test your comprehension of past class discussions and key concepts and monitor the class's comprehension of the assigned reading. For the most part, these quizzes will take place on OWL at the beginning of class. The lowest 3 quiz grades, including missed quizzes, will be dropped from consideration when calculating your final overall grade for quizzes. Given the flexible grading structure, requests for academic consideration for these quizzes will be denied.

The Company Assignment

The Company assignment is modelled after ones designed by Kim Solga in Theatre Studies. In some classes, we will forgo the formalities of a traditional university lecture and get down to the business of performance. I will be dividing the class into groups with roughly six students each. In select weeks you, the students, will run roughly 30 minutes of the class.

Our performance will begin with a scene study presentation by the group designated, for that week, as THE COMPANY. Each Company will be required to do one presentation during the term (see timetable below).

- It will be the Company's job to stage a scene based on one from that week's play, and to take up such roles as actors, director, A/V designer, props/costume designer, dramaturge, and any other role you see fit. The scenes you perform will be "poor" theatre in the best sense of the word: nor a formal, heavily rehearsed performance, although you are free to bring props and costumes as you choose. Your primary task will be to work together to select a specific approach to the scene/play, and then be prepared to explain and explore your choices in class. This "thought work" is *the most important* component of your presentation!
- Those who aren't acting or directing must select a role that will enable them to contribute behind the scenes, by helping to imagine potential visions for the scene, by imagining a design (be prepared to explain and discuss it!) or by applying dramaturgical (that is, critical, close-reading) skills to the text and then offering options to the actors and/or director.
- Please try to take this opportunity to try something new. If you're shy, challenge yourself to try acting once; if you're a raging extrovert, challenge yourself to pull back a bit and let the quieter members of your group shine.

Department of English & Writing Studies

- After each performance, the Company will be asked to get back on stage and participate in a question-and-answer period. Each member of the Company should try to contribute something to the Q&A, especially those whose work has been primarily behind the scenes. This is the time for you to explore in depth, with your colleagues, the terrific thought work that has gone into your presentation!
- The final part of the class will involve a post-performance “talk-back” or discussion, in which your classmates will be able to prepare challenging questions about the Company’s performance choices.
- After the Company performance, you will be asked to write a brief reflection on the assignment and explain how each member contributed to the success of the group. In cases where it is clear that the contributions of the group members were wildly uneven or unfair, I reserve the right to assign grades individually (including assigning grades of 0 to students who did not do the work).
- **N.B. Students must complete their essays on a text other than the one studied in their Company assignment.**

Please note that this assignment is an assessment in this course that requires formal supporting documentation and **does not qualify for the SMC policy outlined in the Policy for Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs**. Any student who is missing their presentation will need to apply for academic consideration for their absence. If a student is absent and the group is unable to complete a Company presentation because of that absence, the Company will present on the make-up date listed in the syllabus. If the Company presents without that student, the absent student will need to communicate with me to discuss an appropriate make-up assignment for the presentation portion of the assignment.

Essays (do not qualify for SMC due to flex deadline)

There are 2 essays due for this class: one short essay (5 pages) and a final research paper (8-10 pages) which will require a proposal (graded pass/fail) and a draft exchange. Papers in English should be written in MLA format. Submit all material in 12-point font on 8.5” x 11” paper, double-spaced and 1” margins. Number each page in the top right corner with your name followed by the page number, as in “Smith 9.” Do not include a title page. The top left of your first page you should include a) your name and student number; b) course title; c) professor’s name; d) essay submission date. After this, include the assignment’s title, centred.

Papers in English should be written in MLA format; this method of documentation is described in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 9th ed, which is available as a digital download on the university’s library website. It’s also available for purchase at the bookstore. The OWL at Purdue website also has an abbreviated guide to MLA guidelines at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

Further details of these papers will be announced later in the course. I encourage you to discuss your papers with me in office hours as you work on them. On the day the essay is due, please upload a copy of it under “Assignments” on Brightspace.

Department of English & Writing Studies

N.B. **you may not submit a paper on the same primary text as your Company presentation.**

Flex deadlines for essays

For both papers, I have listed a “flex deadline,” an automatic extension of 2-4 days. Students may use the flex deadline without notifying me in advance. Students handing in an essay after the flex deadline should consult the late policy below.

Late policy

In situations where a student does not receive accommodations, the penalty for late papers will be 2% per day. Late penalties will be applied for each day of the week, including weekends and holidays. Assignments that are submitted late may receive fewer comments.

Exam

This course will have a closed-book, 3-hour in-person final exam that will cover all of the material of the course. Further details will be provided later in the course.

MORE COURSE POLICIES

Accommodation Policies: Religious Accommodation

Western’s Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf

In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be “given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than **one week** prior to the writing of the test.”

Academic Accommodation and Accessible Education

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.”

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with **Accessible**

Education at the earliest opportunity. Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students.

http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

SUPPORT SERVICES

Academic Advising

Your Home Faculty’s Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses,

Department of English & Writing Studies

academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and Sexual Violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Learning Development and Success

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

USC

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC:
<https://westernusc.ca/services/>.

If you need help

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.