

Theatre 317  
Large Group Project Assignment

Before we start, let me say this here and also several times later throughout the assignment: This is a dramaturgical project. That is, you are doing research with the intention of explaining the creative choices of the playwright and informing the creative choices of your group in performance. Put more simply, and in various attention-getting fonts:

**USE THE RESEARCH TO EXPLAIN THE PLAY.**

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If your portion of the paper does not do this, then you aren't really contributing to the research portion of the project. Now, on to details...

Overview: The larger groups (several of the smaller groups working together) will divide research on a historic play and its production into various specific areas among the group for in-depth research. This will be a play that we DO NOT read this semester, and I would prefer that you not study a playwright whose work we will have read, though in some cases it may be hard to avoid. The group's efforts will culminate in the following:

- 1) A fifteen- to twenty-minute theatrical production given before the class
- 2) The submission of the script for the production
- 3) A fifteen-minute presentation of the research used to create the production
- 4) An oral defense of the choices made in the production
- 5) A research paper with chapters by each individual group member

Topic Areas: The specific play and playwright must come from the historical eras assigned below. **I must approve the play/playwright before research begins.**

Group 3: Ancient Greek or Roman Theatre (not *Lysistrata*, *Trojan Women*, *The Frogs*, *The Wasps*, *The Clouds* or *The Assemblywomen*)

Group 1: Elizabethan (not Shakespeare, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, *Doctor Faustus*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *Edward II*, or *The Jew of Malta*)

Group 2: Spanish, French or Italian Renaissance (Not *The Liar*, *Three Cuckolds*, *The Divine Narcissus*, *Le Cid*, *Fuenteovejuna [The Sheep Well]*, or *Justice Without Revenge*)

Production expectations: Each group will be required to stage a collection of scenes cut from their play. The intention is to capture the arc of the story as well as the play/playwright's theatrical style. This production should run fifteen and twenty minutes and will be performed before the class. Scripts may be in hand, but you must demonstrate a substantial amount of preparation regarding acting, directing, and production choices. This should look like a professionally executed staged reading. The choice of scene(s), location of performance, and the nature and style of the production should be informed by the research gathered for the paper and presentation portions of the project.

You will be expected to work together (theatre is a collaborative art, remember) and to find and develop your own resources. No departmental support will be provided (costumes, props, scenery, lights, etc.), so be creative. You

are encouraged to use “found” spaces for your production, appropriate to the theory/context that your research suggests/inspires you to use. You should aim to impress your audience with your ingenuity, creativity, scholarship, and attention to detail.

**IMPORTANT LOCATION NOTE: You may NOT use any interior spaces in the library. ALL interior locations should be considered with thoughtful respect for the surrounding offices and classrooms. You should find an authority who controls the space, make the timing and nature of the project very clear, and get their permission.**

**IMPORTANT PRODUCTION NOTE: If there is stage violence of any level of danger or complexity (with or without weapons) in your production, you MUST have it cleared with Jonathan or Drew, and I MUST have confirmation of this from one of them via e-mail.**

Presentation Expectations: On the day that you perform, you are expected to provide the rest of the class with both written and verbal information to help them appreciate your performance. You can hand out programs with director's notes, give an oral presentation before or after the performance itself, e-mail everyone in the class the day before with something they are to have read, etc. Since the class won't be reading your paper before they see your production, the point of this presentation is to share the research you've done and emphasize the connections between that research and the performance they're about to see. Your presentation is expected to be practiced, organized, thorough, and thoughtful.

Each group member should contribute to the oral portion of this presentation, which can come before or after the production (“Here's what you're about to see” vs. “Here's what you just saw”). Do NOT simply read your portion of the paper, but rather know what points you're going to make, in what order, and how long it will take to do this. You are limited to fifteen minutes. Consider the presentation an academic performance, and prepare as such.

Paper expectations: The ten group members will be paired up and pair will be required to write one chapter of a large research paper. Each person will individually author one half of a chapter. Each half of a chapter must not only outline factual information pertinent to the topic, but must consistently use that information to explain the play (the full version, not just the cutting) or the group's production choices or both. This will necessitate a thesis statement, introductory paragraph, and a throughline in each half-chapter. Again: USE THE RESEARCH TO EXPLAIN THE PLAY.

Each half-chapter must also:

1. Be clearly attributed to its author (“Chapter 1: Playwright Biography. Part 1: Tyler Smith”)
2. Be between 1600 and 2300 words in length (roughly five to seven pages, but use MS Word's “Word Count” feature to be sure)
3. Be in MLA formatting with parenthetical citations and a works cited page (one works cited page per chapter)
4. Make use of at least four sources, and may NOT cite Brockett, Longman, my lectures, or any unapproved electronic resource
5. Focus on a specific topic area (see Large Group Worksheet for topics)
6. Not overlap the information covered by the author of the other half of the chapter. For instance, if Macbeth and Lear are partners on the Playwright Biography chapter, then Macbeth might cover the playwright's early years and works, while Lear might cover the later years and works. There is no single way to divide this labor, but it must be divided.

The final product, consisting of the five chapters, must

1. Have a table of contents

2. Have a one-page introduction, giving the reader an overview of the content of the paper
3. Have, even though written by ten different authors, a ***consistent through line and recurring themes and arguments that tie the different sections together, and that add up to explain the play and justify the choices made in the production.***

Additionally, to further encourage collaborative authorship, you must write and turn in your paper using Google Documents. Add all group members as editors of a Google document, and add me as an editor as well (my Google ID is tyler.smith@mac.com). If you don't know how to do this, there are numerous tutorials on the internet. Once you start adding content to the paper, send me a link to your paper so that I can track revisions and supervise the progress as the paper moves forward. You will not need to turn in the paper, but simply to stop editing it at the start of class on the day it is due.

Group Defense Expectations: On the next class after your presentation and production, your group will be required to defend the choices made and go into any detail on the research information presented. Your research paper will have been posted on Blackboard, and the class will have had the interim to go over your work and come up with any questions. Be prepared to answer any and all questions about your research and your production choices.

Individual Defense Expectations: Within one week after your Group Defense day, each group member is required to schedule a ten minute meeting with me to discuss your portion of the paper. This conversation will be the basis on which you make revisions to your paper, so come prepared with ideas for improvement, and TAKE NOTES on my suggestions for revision.

Individual Paper Rewrite: Each group member then has one week from the Individual Defense meeting to turn in a re-written individual paper (your half of the chapter). The rewrite must:

1. Most importantly, shift from being simply a chapter from a larger paper to being a standalone paper on your topic, complete with an introductory paragraph (and thesis statement), body, and conclusion.
2. Begin with a one-paragraph summary of the suggestions for revision discussed in the individual defense meeting
3. Address all of these suggestions through
  - a. Expanded investigation into the resources you have used in the first draft
  - b. Expanded research into additional resources you didn't use in the first draft
  - c. Expanded connections between the research and the play and/or production
4. Correct any and all grammatical / mechanical errors present in the first draft of the paper

Peer Evaluation Survey: You will be required to fill out an InQsit survey evaluating the work of your group members (as well as your own work). You will rate each group member's work from a scale of A-F. Additionally, you will be required to write a few sentences (in the InQsit survey) in which you identify what each member researched, how useful their contribution was to your efforts, what each individual's attitudes were, and any special explanations of your own contributions (or lack thereof) that you need to explain. . The InQsit survey will open after the conclusion of your Defense Day and will **close one week later. Nobody other than myself will see your survey.**

From these evaluations I will vary individual grades by as much as one-third. The two highest-scoring group members will receive additional points. Failure to submit a complete Peer Evaluation Survey on time will result in a grade deduction.

Brief Tip: This is a big project. There is no way on earth you can get all of this done in a week, let alone in a few nights before your group presents. Get on it early. Be organized. Make plans. Ask me lots of questions. Know what you're talking about and why you did what you did.

Grading: The entire project is worth 225 points total. Some points will be assessed to the group as a whole, and some points will be given to co-authors of the sections of the paper. The breakdown is as follows:

- Group Points (same grade given to the entire group): 100
  - o Research Presentation: 20
  - o Production: 45
  - o Oral Defense: 20
  - o Research Paper (Overall quality): 15
  - o Script: (Deduction only for un-submitted or sloppy script)
- Individual Points: 125
  - o Your half-chapter: 75
  - o Rewrite of your half-chapter: 50
  - o Peer Evaluation: (Deduction or Bonus depending on results)

## Theatre 317 Large Group Worksheet

When you have decided on the playwright and play you're going to study, you need to divide the group's tasks. You should plan to cover these five topics (in no particular order) in the five chapters of your paper:

1. Cultural Context(s): What were the characteristics of the society in which this play was written and produced? How were gender, class, religion, nationality, race (etc. as relevant) perceived by people of the culture, and how were those issues handled in the play? Focus on the cultural contexts that you have found most relevant to the creation of your production.
2. Playwright's Biography and Body of Work: This section should include the relevant details of the playwright's life as well as an overview of his/her larger body of work, characteristic style, and historical relevance. How does his/her life relate to the play you've chosen? How does this play relate to other plays he/she has written? How does this playwright relate/compare to other major writers of his/her era? Focus on the history, styles and other information that informed your production choices. Again, USE THE RESEARCH TO EXPLAIN THE PLAY. Don't just write a nice tidy bio of the playwright. Make connections between his/her life and specific aspects of the play.
3. Entertainment Context(s): What were the entertainments available to the people of this era? Who went to the theatre? What kinds of plays were audiences used to seeing? What was their typical social class, gender, race, level of education, etc.? How was theatre perceived by the culture? In what other ways did people entertain themselves in this culture? Again, USE THE RESEARCH TO EXPLAIN THE PLAY. Given the other ways they were being entertained, what would your audience have expected from your play? How would they have reacted? How might these things influence your production choices?
4. Original Production: When this play was first produced, what did it look like? How was theatre actually executed in this era and culture? What do we know about acting styles? Scenic/Costume/Lighting/Sound design? Theatre architecture? Were there any relevant critical responses to the original production? Was it popular? Hated? What did people enjoy/dislike? How has all of this impacted your group's production choices? Again, USE THE RESEARCH TO EXPLAIN THE PLAY. How did the original production context influence the writing of the play? The kind of storytelling? How did it influence your group's creative choices?
5. Subsequent Major Productions: Choose several productions of this play that have been undertaken since its debut. What specific creative and stylistic choices were made in those productions? What did reviewers and audiences think of those choices? Again, USE THE RESEARCH TO EXPLAIN THE PLAY. How did those choices relate to or depart from the intention or nature of the original play? How did your study of subsequent productions inform your group's choices? Does this play still work, and why or why not?

You don't have to answer every single question in each topic area, so long as you USE THE RESEARCH TO EXPLAIN THE PLAY. Also make use of the different possible directions of research to create a thoughtful and relevant chapter. You do NOT have to let me know which group members are working on which chapters. However, the sooner you figure that out, the easier it will be to get the work done in an efficient and timely manner.

NOTE: If for some reason your group wants to cover a topic area not included in the five listed above, check with me immediately. Hint: For approval of an alternate topic area, come ready with reasons why your proposed topic is better/more interesting/more relevant than one of my five.

Additionally, I would recommend assigning creative roles for the production (director, actors, designers, etc.), but this is completely optional.

## 317 Large Group Project Good Ideas and Bad Ideas

The good ideas are not requirements, and the bad ideas are not expressly prohibited, but in my observations of these projects, there are things that have worked and things that have not.

### Good Ideas:

- Read the entire play aloud as a group during one of your first group meetings
- Read at least one or two other plays by the playwright
- Use the research to explain the play
- Be able to explain the process of script cutting
- E-mail the class a synopsis of the play beforehand so that they can follow along
- Make sure your individual half-chapter meets the minimum word count
- CHECK YOUR CITATION FORMATTING. AGAIN AND AGAIN.
- Final, thorough edit of the paper before turning it in
- Use the research to explain the play. Does your paper have lots of good history with few connections to the play? This is bad. Fix it.
- Demonstration during the defense of knowledge of your section of the paper as well as knowledge beyond what was covered in the paper
- Be aware of the limitations of your performance location. Outdoors? Great! Just make sure we CAN HEAR YOU, and that you have a rain location.

### Bad Ideas:

- Lack of clarity when justifying creative choices such as location, performance style, etc.
- Failure to use the research to explain the play.
- Put another way: Research of unclear relevance to the play: Failure to tie research paper to the specific content and style of the play.
- Lack of application of research and play analysis to creative choices made in performance
- Lack of rehearsal in presentation of research materials
- Inability during the defense to speak coherently about the playwright's body of work, major themes, styles, trends, etc.
- Repetition of major facts, ideas, or other chunks of information in different sections of the paper