

# Course Title: **Artivism: Ethnic Studies in Theater Arts** 332AF/AS

<b>Grades:</b>	9-12
<b>Length:</b>	Full Year
<b>Environment:</b>	Classroom-based/Theater
<b>Honors:</b>	None
<b>Subject:</b>	Ethnic Studies
<b>Discipline:</b>	Visual and Performing Arts/English Language Arts
<b>Institution:</b>	Santa Ana Unified School District

## Course Overview

Students in this course will synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to observe, analyze and create theatrical works. They will investigate cultural perspectives, community ideas and personal beliefs, as related to theater, while critiquing social constructs that have been conditioned through systems of oppression and underrepresentation as well as misrepresentation to find and develop their own voices through the medium of theater. They will examine theatrical works with a lens on societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding and challenge accepted ideas and biases. They will explore how theater and film have been used to create narratives, archetypes and stereotypes that have been exploited to oppress, persecute and trivialize historically marginalized and underrepresented communities through history as well as discover how theater and film have been utilized also to educate, inform and enlighten the public as a space for all voices to be heard, appreciated and given agency. Students will also analyze the current conditions of the theater and film industries for historically marginalized and underrepresented communities, in regard to, but not limited to, the lack of opportunities, funding and representation and the challenges of creating and transforming these industries to be more equitable and responsive to the needs of historically marginalized and underrepresented communities.

Additionally, this course aims to educate students to be politically, socially, and economically conscious about their personal connections to local and global narratives and histories through the interdisciplinary lens of Ethnic Studies. By studying the histories of race, indigeneity, ancestry, national origin, diaspora, racism, hegemony, ethnicity, and culture, students will develop respect and empathy for individuals, groups of people locally, nationally, and globally. By participating in a student/community-centered Project Based Learning Assignment or Action Civics (Mikva Challenge), students will build self-awareness, solidarity, self-determination and foster active consciousness, social engagement and agency.

## Core Texts

- *Theater of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal, Theater Communications Group, 1993
- *Theater and Race* by Harvey Young, Springer, 2013
- *Worldmaking: Race, Performance and the Work of Creativity* by Dorinne Kondo, Duke University Press Book, 2018

## Unit 1: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in the American Theater

The first unit provides an introduction to the key terms of race, ethnicity, racism, hegemony, master-narrative, oppression, assimilation, acculturation, nativism, discrimination, and integration. With a focus on the archetypes and stereotypes that were created and perpetuated by the American Theater and how those images and narratives directly lent themselves to popular attitudes and official policies that have damaged historically marginalized and underrepresented communities for centuries and still exist today. Students will be able to explore the function of history and culture in the development of dramatic concepts through critical analysis of original ideas in theatrical works that either empowered or misrepresented historically marginalized and underrepresented communities.

### Essential Questions:

- What is identity? How do we define ourselves?
- What is the difference between race, ethnicity, national origin?
- What are the origins of race, racism and white supremacy in the United States?
- How has race been socially constructed and what role has the American Theater played?
- What does “colorblind casting” mean and how does it impact today’s American Theater?
- How have historically marginalized and underrepresented communities theater artists challenged those systems of oppression and discrimination?
- What is prejudice, stereotype, and discrimination within the context of the American Theater?
- How can stereotypes affect our thinking of different social groups?
- How do theatrical works, plays and films, impact how a person identifies themselves?

### Guiding questions:

- In “The Ground on Which I Stand,” what does Wilson refer to when he refers to the “ground on which he stands?”
- In what ways can using a play to educate audiences on diverse cultural behavior patterns become an effective sociological tool?
- What is the condition of the Black American Theater and how can it be improved?

- How do the roles of economics and class status impact the divide between white audiences and black audiences?
- What do the ‘tortillas’ represent in Anaya’s famous essay?
- How do oppressive systems impact artists of color and what is the harm done by this kind of self-censorship?
- What is the underlying lesson Anaya intends for his reader to understand regarding voice, identity and art?

## Performance Tasks

1. Students will investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas, and personal beliefs impact a theatrical work. They will do this with a presentation, analyzing one specific work and how it created a narrative that directly or indirectly translated into cultural norms or actionable discriminatory policies.
2. Students will create an original monologue that will reflect their own voice, their own background and their own cultural identity.

## Core Text:

- *Metamora. The Last of the Wampanogs* by John Augustus Stone, 1829
- *The Dance and The Railroad* by David Henry Hwang, New American Library, 1983
- *The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa FastHorse, 2018

## Unit 2: The Theater of the Oppressed

In the second unit, students will study how theater has been used to uplift, empower and embolden voices of marginalized peoples and how to effectively use theater as a tool for social change. Using the text from Augusto Boal’s seminal work, *Theater of the Oppressed*, students will explore the methodology of Boal’s approach to use theater for empowerment. Through Boal’s method of Forum Theater, students will respond to what is seen, felt and heard in a dramatic work to develop criteria for artistic choices that can be translated to individual choices in cases of oppression.

Students will justify and compare cultural perspectives and contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theater work and make choices that are more reflective of, and respectful to diverse perspectives.

Students will formulate a deeper understanding of a drama/theater work, consider the author’s intent, the intended audience and the cultural biases that are directly or indirectly apparent in the work.

## Essential Questions:

- What role has theater played in social movements in the past?
- How can Theater of the Oppressed, and more specifically Forum Theater, be used to address social issues and heal social-emotional trauma?

- How can role-playing scenes of oppression and injustice help to train us to be active participants in correcting those wrongs rather than passively accepting them?
- Can we use Forum Theater to address problems of inequality and unfairness within the school system?

#### Guiding Questions:

- What is Theater of the Oppressed and how can it be used to create social change?
- What are the basic functions of Boal's Forum Theater, Invisible Theater and Legislative Theater and how can they be applied to social issues of the day?
- How does the audience's role as "spect-actor" contribute to the audience's understanding and humanization of the theater experience? How does this understanding and humanization then impact the audience's desire to create social change?

#### Performance Tasks:

1. In the beginning of the unit, students will participate and practice the method of Forum Theater, created by Augusto Boal to give voice and empowerment to students in dealing with systems of oppression.
2. Using the plays by Luis Valdez and the Teatro Campesino (the theater wing of Cesar Chavez's Farm Workers Rights Movement), *Pipeline* by Dominique Morriseau and *In The Heights* by Lin Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegria Hudes that feature stories of empowerment and agency for those oppressed; students will analyze and compare artistic choices with their specific purpose and intended audience. Students will hold a discussion comparing the plays and answer questions like what artistic choices did the writers choose and why?

#### Core Texts:

- *The Theater of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal

#### Supplementary Texts:

- *The Works of Luis Valdez and Teatro Campesino*
- *American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays* by Diane Glancy, University of Oklahoma Press, 2002
- *In The Heights* by Lin Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegria Hudes

## Unit 3: The American Theater and Race

In the third unit, students will explore the current state of the American Theater in relation to race and the way the industry itself perpetuates a system that elevates certain kinds of stories, voices and characters while creating barriers for others. Students will understand the challenges faced by historically marginalized and

underrepresented artists to find a space for their stories, their characters and their place in the theater landscape as theater spaces still lack historically marginalized and underrepresented leadership and, too often, theaters are funded by donors and season ticket holders that are predominantly those with a high level of privilege. Students will find ways to navigate the challenges of today's American Theater, present a counter narrative to the status quo, and amplify the voices of the underrepresented.

#### Essential Questions:

- What is the state of the American Theater today in regard to race and gender identity?
- What are the challenges that historically marginalized and underrepresented artists face and how are they overcoming obstacles?
- What changes are required to create a more equitable and inclusive American Theater for the next generation of artists?
- What does it mean for a theater company to be *inclusive* and does it matter when many underrepresented groups have formed excellent theater companies that celebrate and empower the voices and artists of their own communities?
- What is colorblind casting and does it actually help to create inclusion or does it actually simply maintain the status quo while giving the appearance of diversity?
- Are there plays with so-called universal themes and if there are, is it unfair to lift stories that have wider appeal at the cost of stories that are layered with distinct cultural undertones?
- Should writers be encouraged to drop their own languages in favor of English on the assumption that the audiences won't understand?

#### Guiding Questions:

- Based on the information presented in *The Visibility Report, Racial Representation on NYC Stages*, what trends (patterns) do you notice in the data regarding representation of minorities in NYC theater?
- What source(s) or types of data would you compare *The Visibility Report* to in order to determine what you would consider fair representation in theater?
- Why would or wouldn't identity data from NYC theater be representative of the wider American population? Considering that NYC theater often sets the tone for theatrical productions nation-wide, does it bear a responsibility to be more inclusive in representation?

#### Performance Tasks:

1. Students will examine and analyze the data regarding representation in Broadway theaters, and across the country. Then, they will present the findings to the class in groups that will represent various underrepresented groups and

relate how the disparities and advances differ from each group and where they are similar.

2. Students will propose specific strategies that theaters could utilize to increase diversity and make their shows and audiences more inclusive. The class will use Boal's Legislative Theater technique to divide workable, specific proposals that students will present to local theater leaders.

### **Core Text:**

*The Visibility Report, Racial Representation on NYC Stages* by Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC) 2018-2019 <http://www.aapacnyc.org/>

*Principles on Building Anti-Racist Theater Systems/Dear White American* by We See You (A collective of BIPOC artists), 2020,

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ede42fd6cb927448d9d0525/t/60262df611ccc800db7defb9/1613114870376/PRINCIPLES+FOR+BUILDING+ANTI-RACIST+THEATRE+SYSTEMS.pdf>

*The 40 Year Old Version* by Radha Blank, 2020, Film

## **Unit 4: Finding a Voice**

Students will research how historically marginalized and underrepresented theater artists apply creative processes to tell their stories in a devised or scripted drama/theater work, using theater research methods. Students will also use basic theater research methods to better understand the social and cultural background of drama/theater works written from perspectives of historically marginalized and underrepresented artists. Students will analyze selected scenes and scripts to deepen their understanding and their appreciation of the various historically underrepresented voices in the context of theater arts.

### **Essential Questions:**

- How do theater artists use this medium to represent their culture, articulate the challenges faced within American society, and ultimately empower audiences to advocate for social change?
- What are the similarities and differences within the context of American society between various underrepresented groups that are identified and expressed through the selected works for this unit?
- How do their stories help us to understand better their unique challenges and appreciate their unique voices?
- Can the medium of the storytelling itself also reflect cultural differences?
- Are there cases where casting can be open to actors that are not from the same underrepresented groups (i.e. can a Latinx actor play a Middle Eastern character if the actor can respectfully play the role? Is it okay for cis/hetero actors to play LGBTQ+ characters? What about playing the roles of characters with disabilities?)

- What is the difference between thought-provoking theatrical art and propaganda?
- Which makes the bigger impact on social change, the product or the process? To put this clearer, is it more powerful to create a play that makes its audience think differently, or is it more impactful to create an artistic experience that empowers the cast and crew, made up of community members, through the artistic process such as devised pieces as is the method made most famous by Los Angeles's renown Cornerstone Theater Company.
- Is it necessary to create works that appeal to a "mainstream" audience in order to be successful and recognized?

#### Guiding Questions:

- The title of Lauren Yee's play in this unit is a slur formerly used to address Asian-Americans (usually of Chinese national origin). What do you think is Yee's purpose for using a controversial title? Do you believe that reappropriating slurs is an effective way for a marginalized community to reduce that word's negative power and in turn empower that community with its use?
- In the play *Pipeline*, Nya, a Black woman who teaches at a public inner-city high school, chooses to send her son to a private school. How would you interpret Nya's decision to send her son to private school within the context of her job to provide educational opportunities for her own students of color? Does Nya's decision indicate a lack of belief in a fair and unbiased education system? What would you do if you were in Nya's position and why?
- The film *Moonlight* deals with multiple issues related to navigating identity, including intersectionality. What is intersectionality, and how does it complicate issues of identity? Why is intersectionality important in understanding individuals as holistic and complete while simultaneously belonging to multiple marginalized communities?

#### Performance Tasks:

1. Students will read, analyze and perform scenes from selected works that reflect a variety of historically marginalized and underrepresented theater works. Through their performances and presentations, students will practice and revise theater works using theatrical staging conventions. They will explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to the theater work. They will refine technical design choices to support the story and emotional impact of theater work. Through the process, students will discuss and reflect the cultural and historical context of each work.
2. Students will examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a theater work. Students will shape character choices using given circumstances in a theater work. Through the process of creating characters from selected works by historically marginalized and underrepresented artists, students will be able to

deepen their understanding of persons with similar backgrounds and histories as well as those that are different from their own experiences. Students will articulate their experiences with these theater works in the form of a discussion or a written reflection.

3. Students will begin imagining and brainstorming themes and stories for the capstone activist project, Theater Arts Activism. This show will incorporate themes discussed in this course, with the explicit purpose of connecting students with their local community and larger professional theater community to engage audiences through stage performance. This project will be worked on throughout the rest of the semester.

### **Core Texts:**

*Ching Chong Chinaman* by Lauren Yee, Concord Theatricals, 2007

*Pipeline* by Dominique Morisseau, Theatre Communications Group, 2017

*Simply Maria; or The American Dream* by Josefina Lopez, Dramatic Publishing, 2005

*The Domestic Crusaders* by Wajahat Ali, 2010

*Moonlight* by Barry Jenkins, Tarell Alvin McCraney, 2016 (Film) (Rated R - May need permission slips if entire movie is shown)

## **Unit 5: Rewriting the Script**

Students will be able to refine new work through plays, scenes and/or monologues using critical analysis and experimentation in works that reflect, represent and/or celebrate their own identities, cultural or otherwise. Students will develop and refine artistic techniques and work for performances that reflect their own identities while also reflecting on the works of their classmates. Through the process of playwriting, directing and performing original works, students will deepen their own understanding of their own voices, their own cultural backgrounds and their own individuality while also gaining an understanding and appreciation for the identities of their classmates through their theatrical works. Students will understand the power that creative expression holds through the medium of theater as a way to gain understanding and, ultimately, lead toward social change and social justice.

### **Essential Questions:**

- What stories resonate with us? What are the essential elements that connect us to those specific stories? How do we incorporate those elements into our own works?
- How do we create works that reflect our realities with our own voices and preserve the cultural elements that give our voices distinction?
- What mediums will serve our stories best?



- Where will the pieces be performed and for whom?
- How do we create characters in imaginary stories that, however creative, remain truthful to our own voices and realities and reflect our culture and experiences?
- How do theater artists collaborate together to create works?
- Through collaboration, how do we retain those elements of the story that reflect our own identities even while elevating the various identities of our collaborators?

#### Guiding Questions:

- In Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone*, how does the playwright express and reflect his Vietnamese-American identity through the use of language, action, setting, themes, and/or plot? Is Nguyen's voice distinct in his play? Why or why not?
- Lynn Nottage's play *Sweat* centers on a working class town in Pennsylvania, and examines the intersections of race and class. What historic developments and policies in the U.S. have influenced racial divisions or tensions as they relate to class and/or economics?
- *Chavez Ravine* has been presented as a text, play, and film. Which medium(s) do you believe best serves this particular story and why?
- The history of Chavez Ravine has been told and retold through various lenses. What is the significance of the story being retold by the Latino and Chicano performance group Culture Clash in *Chavez Ravine*?

#### Performance Tasks:

1. Students will create, direct and perform scripts that will ultimately become plays, scenes and/or monologues that express their own identities, their own cultural backgrounds, their own unique voices while synthesizing the many aspects of culture and identity that have been discussed and explored throughout the course.
2. Students will have the opportunity to reflect and observe the works of their classmates and analyze those works through the lens of culture, identity and background and how those works connect to the larger themes of this course.

#### Core Texts:

*Vietgone* by Qui Nguyen, Concord Theatricals, 2016

*Sweat* by Lynn Nottage, 2018

*Chavez Ravine* by Culture Clash, 2018

## Unit 6: Community Engagement, Empowerment and Theater Arts Activism

Students will conceptualize, imagine, and create new theatrical works that address systemic racism and promote collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing. Students will create works that are student and community-focused, ensure civic engagement and elevate the dialogue between audience members of different backgrounds and ethnicities. It is encouraged that teachers connect with local theater companies (such as *Breath of Fire Latina Theater Ensemble*, *South Coast Repertory Theater*, and the *Brown Bag Theater Company* from UC Irvine) and artists for support and guidance in creating this kind of theater as a way of engaging the community. The District VAPA Department will support teachers in connecting to local theater companies. Students will, as a capstone project, create a collaborative work that will be presented to the community in whatever format is best suited for the work that is developed by the class. Such projects can include adaptations of Folktales and Legends derived from our own cultures performed to educate and connect local children about their own culture and history, devised original works that address the concerns and issues that face our community, or original monologues and short plays that are based on actual stories from our own family histories.

### Essential Questions:

- What theater companies or organizations exist in and around our own communities and how can we find ways to collaborate and create partnerships that will give our students an expanded view of the theater arts industry as well as allow for them to get training from working professionals.
- How do we create an original work (or works) as a collaborative process that honors each individual voice?
- What is the best medium to present the work(s) to our community?
- What roles can each individual play and how does each role assist in the storytelling (i.e. the writers, directors, actors, lighting designers, costume designers, makeup artists, etc)?
- Are there ways to bring community members into the creative process and through that process can we inspire social change?

### Guiding Questions:

- Why is it critical for communities to have their own local theater companies and organizations?
- What are different ways that community members can engage with local theater? How can community theater be made more accessible, both physically and socially?

- How can engaging with local community theater bring about social change with respect to ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression?
- What type of works do you think your community would find most engaging and meaningful?

### Performance Tasks:

1. Students will use Augusto Boal’s Legislative Theater process as a means to identify and establish specific laws that should be enforced or created by the school district, city or state office holders or civic leaders.
2. Students will create a show that challenges the audience to identify and understand various issues that impact historically marginalized and underrepresented communities and inspires them to engage in social change.
3. Students will provide theater exercises to younger community members that also help them engage in scenarios of oppression, develop the skills and language to empower themselves for real-life situations and circumstances.

## Materials/Resources

Title	Author/Playwright	Publisher	Year	Website	Description
<b>Books/Essays</b>					
Theater of the Oppressed	Augusto Boal	Theater Communications Group	1993		Augusto Boal’s seminal work on the process of creating social change through the process of theater
“The Ground on Which I Stand”	August Wilson	Theater Communications Group, Inc.	1996	<a href="https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/06/20/the-ground-on-which-i-stand/">https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/06/20/the-ground-on-which-i-stand/</a>	August Wilson’s widely published speech on being a Black theater artist, the state of Black Theater in America
“Take the Tortillas Out of Your Poetry” <i>The Anaya Reader</i>	Rudolfo Anaya	Grand Central Publishing	1995		Rudolfo Anaya’s essay on the dangers of self-censorship.
Principles on Building Anti-Racist Theater	We See You (A collective of		2020	<a href="https://static1.squarespace.com/static">https://static1.squarespace.com/static</a>	An address that was published in

Systems/Dear White American Theater	BIPOC artists)			<a href="#">/5ede42fd6cb927448d9d0525/t/60262df611ccc800db7defb9/1613114870376/PRINCIPLES+FOR+BUILDING+ANTI-RACIST+THEATRE+SYSTEMS.pdf</a>	the wake of the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 that addresses the systemic racism in the theater industry.
<b>Plays/Scripts</b>					The following are works that should be considered for use in either their entirety or excerpts from these works.
<u><i>Vietgone</i></u>	Qui Nguyen	Concord Theatricals	2016		
<u><i>The Dance and The Railroad</i></u>	David Henry Hwang	New American Library	1983		
<u><i>FOB</i></u>	David Henry Hwang	New American Library	1990		
<u><i>Family Devotions</i></u>	David Henry Hwang	New American Library	1981		
<u><i>Ching Chong Chinaman</i></u>	Lauren Yee	Concord Theatricals	2007		
<u><i>American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays</i></u>	Diane Glancy	University of Oklahoma Press	2002		
<u><i>Caught</i></u>	Christopher Chen	New American Library	2009		
<u><i>A Raisin in the Sun</i></u>	Lorraine Hansberry		1959		
<u><i>Unto These Hills</i></u>	Kermit Hunter		1950		
<u><i>Pipeline</i></u>	Dominique Morisseau		2017		
<u><i>For the Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Was Enuf</i></u>	Ntozake Shange		1974		
<u><i>Refugee Rhapsody</i></u>	Yussef El Guindi		2021		

<u><i>The Piano Lesson</i></u>	August Wilson		1987		
<u><i>Back of the Throat</i></u>	Yussef El Guindi		2019		
<u><i>Sweat</i></u>	Lynn Nottage		2018		
<u><i>Simply Maria</i></u>	Josefina Lopez		1996		
<u><i>Disgraced</i></u>	Ayad Akhtar		2021		
<u><i>American Mariachi</i></u>	Jose Cruz Gonzalez		2016		
<u><i>The Domestic Crusaders</i></u>	Wajahat Ali		2010		
<u><i>Chavez Ravine</i></u>	Culture Clash				
<u><i>The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity</i></u>	Kristoffer Diaz		2009		
<u><i>Men on the Verge of a His-Panic Breakdown</i></u>	Guillermo Reyes		1999		
<u><i>Fade</i></u>	Tanya Saracho		2017		
<u><i>The Thanksgiving Play</i></u>	Larissa FastHorse		2018		
<u><i>Metamora; or The Last of the Wampanoags</i></u>	John Augustus Stone		1829		
<u><i>Manhatta</i></u>	Mary Kathryn Nagle		2018		
<i>Monologues for Latino/a Actors</i>	Micha Espinoza		2014	Smith and Krauss	A collection of monologues by Latinx Playwrights
<i>Scenes for Latino/a Actors</i>	Micha Espinoza		2019	Smith and Krauss	A Collection of scenes written by Latinx Playwrights
<i>All of Us</i>	Jonathan Dorf		2021	YouthPlays	A collection of short plays by diverse writers
<i>Ghosts of Bogota</i>	Diana Burbano		2020	Stage Rights	
<b>Films/Videos</b>					The following are works that should

					be considered for use in either their entirety or excerpts from these works.
<u><i>Allegiance</i></u>	Jay Kuo, Marc Acito		2012	Video: Broadway HD	
<u><i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i></u>	August Wilson		1982	Video: 2020 Film	
<u><i>Fences</i></u>	August Wilson		1986	Video: 2019 Film	
<u><i>Moonlight</i></u>	Barry Jenkins, Tarell Alvin McCraney		2016	Film: 2016	
<u><i>In the Heights</i></u>	Lin Manuel Miranda		2008	Film: 2021	
<u><i>Zoot Suit</i></u>	Luis Valdez		1981	Film	
<u><i>The 40 Year Old Version</i></u>	Radha Blank		2020	Film	