

Dramatic Presentation

I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano, A stage where every man must play a part. —"Merchant of Venice"

12 groups consisting of 6 or 7 members each will sign up on for a dramatic presentation of a play. Perhaps the best way to begin explaining this assignment will be to review what I hope you will gain by this experience:

1. As we will discuss, it is essential when reading to imagine a dramatic scene unfolding visually. Putting on your own 15-minute scene (not the entire play) will help you develop a more concrete and specific picture of what the author's words mean. The skills you develop while presenting one text will help you in reading others.
2. Learning to work with a group is one of the most important skills you need to develop before entering the job market. Employers are demanding people who are articulate and can work effectively in small group situations. You can always complain about what certain people do or don't do, but you need to go beyond that and develop effective group skills.
3. Collaborative learning is essential, and it can be best promoted in small group settings. In past classes these groups have also served as study groups and created new friendships. This activity should help us create more intimate and personal working groups, which should also help us create a more open atmosphere in our classroom.

Here are the criteria:

1. You will *not* be judged for your ability as a trained dramatic actor. You may use the text while you are reading your part. All members of the group must act by reading at least some lines, but you may choose to put a significant percentage of your efforts into work as a director, text editor, or set designer. The actors must demonstrate that they understand the words they are reading aloud by using appropriate intonation, rhythm and gestures. Your editing must create a coherent script. The set designers should help create the atmosphere and message desired by the group and director. The group should have a "vision" in mind; that is, you should fashion a creative production that presents some kind of interpretation of the material you are presenting. You should place your scene in a 20th century setting.
2. You must use the author's words, but feel free to cut and splice according to your "vision." You are not limited to reproducing a single scene as presented in our text. In other words, feel free to use creative approaches to editing the text, creating scenery and costumes, and blocking. Your performance must be no longer than 15 minutes. After your production, the class will ask a few questions about your approach and what you were trying to do. The one approach you should absolutely avoid is presenting the entire play in a truncated fashion, with your goal being to present the "highlights." Your vision needs to be more specific and concrete.
3. Your group must schedule a conference with me before your performance. During this conference, we will review and debate your proposed "vision."
4. The group will turn in a portfolio no later than two class periods after the performance. Divide your portfolio into the following sections:
 - a. One page defining the "vision" of the group.
 - b. One page from each member describing in full her or his contribution to the production. Please say specifically how many of the group meetings you attended and what you contributed to the production, including what role you played.
 - c. One page explaining the purpose of your scenery, setting, and costumes.
 - d. The edited script used for the performance.
 - e. One page reflecting on the success of the performance.

Individual grades will be given based on the individual's contribution and on the success of the group's performance and portfolio as a whole. Creativity and coherence will be most highly rewarded. (See the Grading Guide below). As students of English, however, you are expected to write well, so that sloppy writing, poor grammar, and misspellings will lower your grade. You should get the audience to see the text in a new light. Feel free to draw upon video and audio recordings, when available, for inspiration.

Grading Guide

Quality of Group Vision (40 points possible)

Creativity and clarity in the interpretation of the text; strong message; coherent presentation; originality; provocative and thoughtful adaptation of the printed text; appropriate awareness of the complexity of dramatic conflict.

Quality of Scenery/Setting/Costumes (20 points possible)

Creativity and expressiveness of the scenery, setting, and costumes; coherent relationship between these three aspects of the production; strong sense of atmosphere that communicates the group vision; appropriate awareness of the differences between characters; awareness of the complexity of gender, race, and/or class distinctions.

Quality of Individual Readings (20 points possible)

Appropriate awareness of intonation, rhythm, and gestures; coherent presentation of the character that supports the group vision; demonstrated awareness of what the words mean; appropriate gestures and movement while not speaking.

Quality of Editing (20 points possible)

Creativity and coherence of the script; appropriate editing that supports the group vision; smooth cutting and/or splicing; appropriate sense of the complexity of the author's language; appropriate awareness of the author's goal to entertain.

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