OSHER 584
Dates: Wednesdays, 9/30/15-11/4/15, no class 10/13
Times: 9:30AM-11:00AM
Location: Commander’s House, Fort Douglas
Instructor: Richard Scharine

Plays: Production Locations and Dates

*Animal Farm*, George Orwell’s novel, adapted by Ian Woolridge. Available from Dramatic Publishing.  **Babcock Theatre** (downstairs from PMT).  *7:30 p.m.* Oct. 2-4, 8-10;  *2:00 p.m.* Oct. 3, 10.


*Good Kids*, by Naomi Lizuka. Text contributed by the Theatre Department.  **Studio 115** (Performing Arts Building).  *7:30 p.m.* Oct. 30-Nov. 1, Nov. 5-8,  *2:00 p.m.* Nov. 7-8.

Defining the Political Play
All plays are “political” in the sense that they embody a system of values. However, the vast majority of plays are not recognized as political because the systems of values they reinforce are shared by most of the people in the audience. Like all plays, political plays require conflict, but political plays are neither tragedies, in which the individual is destroyed by fate, nor melodramas, in which the individual is endangered by a villain. A political play depicts individuals, who by dint of being identified as part of a social group, receive unfair treatment based upon a generally accepted system of laws, values, or ways of doing things. The system may be legal, bureaucratic, ideological, nationalistic, religious, racial, gender-based, or the reflection of communal values, but it is usually unchallenged. Some people simply call it “the way things are”.

Warnings about Political Theatre
By definition, every play studied in this class contains an issue which has been troubling to some Americans at some time. It is our purpose as a class to examine the issue these plays put forth, the historical context in which the issues appeared, and the methods the playwrights used to communicate them to us. Sometimes the plays may appear—as they have to other audiences—disturbing (or worse, irrelevant) to us. Nevertheless, this class should be a safe place to examine both issues and means of presentation, while remaining respectful to those who hold differing opinions. Remember that plays are depictions of human beings onstage, and thus are partly emotional and partly intellectual. It is to be expected that your response as an audience member will combine both states of mind.

Methodology
Two classes will be devoted to each play. (1) The first class will be a lecture/discussion on the storyline of the play, its social setting, characters and themes, as well as the theatrical techniques—dramatic genres, acting styles, visual and aural means of conveying information, etc.—used in its staging. (2) In between the two classes, students are expected to attend a performance of the play. (3) The second meeting will be a discussion of the production of the play by class members, and will feature a theatre artist who contributed to the presentation.

**Objectives**

To provide insights into the construction of the play. How its genre (realism, presentationalism, symbolism, etc.), setting, characterization, use of sound and light, etc. contribute to the audience’s understanding and enjoyment. To gain insight into issues that have affected (and continue to affect) our lives in ways of which we may not even be aware—our political past and present, the legal system intended to “protect and serve” us, and the social assumptions we often accept without question.

**Class Schedule**

**September 30:** Farm animals revolt against their drunken owner, drive him away, and take over the running of the farm for their communal advantages in George Orwell’s satire of the events leading up to the Russian revolution and continuing into the era of Stalin’s dictatorship. “All animals are equal” is the guiding principle of *Animal Farm*, until under a cult of personality and the presence of brute force we learn to our shock that “some animals are more equal than others”.

**October 7:** Remember that in order to discuss *Animal Farm* you must see one of the performances on the play’s first weekend (7:30 p.m.—Oct. 2-4; 2 p.m.—Oct. 3). A contributing artist to the production will take part in our discussion. Tickets can be purchased in advance at the Kingsbury Hall box office, or will be available at the door.

**October 14:** *The Exonerated* is a docudrama, i.e. every word in the play comes from a real life source, including in some cases the actual court records of five men and a woman who spent anywhere from two to twenty-two years on Death Row for crimes they didn’t commit. The stories of these survivors raises the question of whether Capital Punishment can ever be anything but “Cruel and Unusual”.

**October 21:** Again, you have only three performances of *The Exonerated* (Oct. 16, 17, or 18) before we are to discuss the play. Tickets can be reserved in advance at the People Productions website (www.peopleproductions.org) or purchased at the door. The play is sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Innocence Center, which is dedicated to the freeing of the unjustly imprisoned, and all proceeds of the play will go to the RMIC. Hopefully, a representative of the RMIC will answer our questions at this class.

**October 28:** *Good Kids* takes place after a high school party, where a girl was raped by a gang of football players while passed out drunk. What is the greatest damage to the girl? The rape itself, or the damage to her sense of self, her reputation, and her social position? Who is to blame? The predatory boys, the organization that failed to supervise the party, or the provocatively dressed girl who allowed herself to be placed in a compromising position.

**November 4:** Once again, there are only three performances of *Good Kids* (7:30 p.m. October 30-November 1) before the class meets for discussion. The crime itself is only part of the discussion, which must also include changing social expectation. Tickets can be purchased in advance at the Kingsbury Hall box office, or will be available at the door.