

Matthew Singletary

MatthewSingletary@hotmail.com * www.MattSingletary.com

TEACHING STATEMENT

Theatre is both a reflection and a response to the world and times in which we live. If we are to guide our students as well as encourage their own independent growth as artists, we must start by examining the specifics of each creative craft (acting, directing, design & production) – what the techniques are, how they work, and why we choose these particular approaches to the art. Most importantly, we must contextualize every aspect of the dramatic world – not only historically but also with an emphasis on contemporary understanding and practice.

When teaching acting, I begin with a focus on the fundamentals of the craft and their practical application. I have studied numerous techniques over the years; my personal approach is a mixture of Hagen, Meisner, Shurtleff and Practical Aesthetics. As students understand that behavior tells the story, they're able to move away from mental manipulation of a scene and into acting that is rooted in an exploration of the text but also alive in response to their circumstances and relationship(s) to their partner(s) in the scene. Over the years, I've adapted, developed and utilized numerous techniques to promote a pragmatic yet visceral approach to the work of an actor. These include exercises for line memorization, rules for understanding action-beat structure in text, and practical utilization of major discoveries and decisions in scenes and monologues.

The study of directing begins with an analysis of dramatic structure. I utilize books such as Aristotle's *Poetics*, Terry McCabe's *Misdirecting The Play*, and David Ball's *Backwards & Forwards* to teach students about deconstructing plot using major events in the script, identifying theme in a text, and drawing out circumstance to help build the world of the production. I also use film and television examples to teach about story; I've never seen a better explanation of the Aristotelian story arc than in Doc Brown's heist model in *Back to the Future Part 3*. In class, I use collage-building exercises to help students unlock conceptualization for a production. Finally, in practical application, directing students mount a 10-minute play in class with actors and unit-sets in order to focus on interacting with a cast and telling a story. This prepares them to work on larger projects in a theatrical season.

A study of the history of theatre, film and television is crucial to understanding the world of today's theatrical artists. I have used videos of hip-hop dance troops to illustrate the power of a Greek Chorus. Contemporary teen television dramas can unlock the world of *Hamlet* for today's students; the same applies to examining correlations between Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and the 2019 *Captain Marvel* film. I've used a lecture on *Night of the Living Dead* and the rise of our cultural fascination with zombies to open students' eyes to the history of civil rights, our society's inherent consumerism, and America's fear of a global pandemic. The end goal of a vibrant theatrical education that brings history and technique to the contemporary student is to expand the understanding of what it means to be a human being in today's world and to launch the careers of tomorrow's dynamic media artists.