Storytelling Performance  
Fall 2017  
English 60a

Prof. David Sherman  
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office hours: Wed. 10:00-11:00, Thur. 1:00-2:30, and by appt.  
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Class Schedule:  
Mon, Wed, Thur 12:00-12:50  
Shiffman Humanities Center 217

... stories are as much physical as metaphysical. As stories tell people who they are, those people are embodied as much by their stories as by their flesh. Stories, like bodies and in symbiosis with bodies, are people’s dignity and their calamity.  
— Arthur Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*

I will tell you something about stories  
[he said]  
They aren’t just entertainment.  
Don’t be fooled.  
They are all we have, you see,  
all we have to fight off  
ilness and death.

You don’t have anything  
if you don’t have the stories.  
— Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Welcome to the Brandeis Storytelling Brigade. In this workshop and performance group, you’ll create and perform stories, organize shows, and reflect on the power of narrative in the world. We’ll be immersed in storytelling practices all semester.

We’ll function as a creative collective, actively sharing ideas and generating storytelling situations on campus and elsewhere in the Waltham and Boston areas. Our process will be collaborative, improvisational, and risking. You’ll fashion stories from your own experiences, folk traditions, historical research, and your imagination. You’ll learn that everyone bears stories within, waiting to be shaped and shared.

You’ll also learn to organize the logistics for many kinds of performances, before a variety of audiences. In this worldly engagement, you’ll experience the ways that storytelling skills are relevant to education, community outreach, business enterprise, theatrical productions, and other projects. You’ll have time to consider the countless ways that powerful stories build communities and motivate action.
Learning Objectives:
• to develop skills for actively collaborating with others in a group and for contributing to a group’s creative production
• to learn how to create and perform entertaining and educational stories without notes before a live audience
• to learn techniques for productively critiquing others’ performances and helping others improve as performers
• to be able to create social situations in which stories are exchanged or circulated, and to be able to use these experiences to analyze how social situations are transformed by the exchange of stories

Required Books:
• Dedicated storytelling notebook. By the end of the semester, you will have written your own book of story ideas, performance notes, and theoretical insights in these pages. Bring this working notebook to every class session.
• Select a collection of folktales that you’d like to own. This can be an anthology of traditional, oral stories from anywhere in the world, translated from any languages. Find a book that will be useful for you as you seek stories to learn for your own performances. You can find these anthologies and collections sold for competitive prices at used and new bookstores and online. Please be prepared to say a few words about your book to the class on Monday, 9/18.
• Other assigned readings are posted on LATTE.

Assignments and Requirements:
Workshop Participation: over the entire semester, we’ll develop and perform a repertoire of individual and group stories. We’ll craft these stories during in-class exercises and workshops in which we advise one another on every aspect of our storytelling: characterization, plot design, narrative sequencing, organizing audience participation, vocal force and clarity, gesture, and bodily staging. We’ll provide one another with ongoing written and verbal feedback, according to the rubrics that we collectively develop, about each of these storytelling performance elements. Workshop participation will be assessed by the effort and care that you demonstrate in your rehearsals and in giving feedback to others. 5%.

Moth Recommendation: LATTE post with link to a good story that you’ve discovered on The Moth website. In your post, include a brief discussion about what you admire about this storyteller’s performance and what we can learn from it about this particular genre of storytelling, the short autobiographical story. Website for The Moth: themoth.org. Its extensive library of storytelling performances: themoth.org/story-library/podcast and themoth.org/story-library/stories. Due 9/6. 5%.

Non-Biographical Story Recommendation: LATTE post with citation or link to a performance of a good story you’ve discovered in some genre besides autobiography. This can be a video or audio performance of a folktale, historical story, fiction, or other. In your post, include a brief discussion about what you admire about this storytelling performance and what we can learn from it about this particular genre of storytelling. Due 9/18. 5%.
Event Proposal: brief proposal for a potential Brandeis Storytelling Brigade event. Think creatively about theme and structure; do some research into campus spaces and beyond. The class will use these proposals for brainstorming and planning sessions. Email this proposal to me by 9:00 a.m., Thursday, 9/7. 5%.

Story for Friends/Family, with Written Reflection: perform a story, any genre, of at least 5 minutes for friends or family, in a comfortable situation. This is practice for more public performances. After performing, ask for feedback or have a conversation with your audience about how your story works. Write a brief reflection, about 1 page, about the experience. Credit / No credit. Due 9/7. 5%.

Story for the Class: perform a story of any genre, 5 minutes, for the class. Performances will be on 9/11, 9/13, 9/14. Credit / No credit. 5%.

Pop Up Storytelling, with LATTE Post: in small groups, perform spontaneous stories before willing strangers on campus. Groups, places, and other logistical details tbd. These pop up storytelling performances will also serve as publicity for scheduled performances. Each group should post a brief description of their experience on LATTE. Performances will be 9/27 and 9/28. Credit / No credit. 5%.

Four Public Performances: throughout the semester, we’ll perform our stories before live audiences in the Waltham and Boston areas. We’ll perform before several age groups in a variety of venues. Stories will be assessed by the effort and care that you demonstrate in your performances. 10% each.

Reflections on Storytelling Experience 1-3: 2-3 page reflections on your experiences of developing and performing stories as a part of a collective. These can be in the form of personal journals or records, descriptive fragments, images, theoretical speculations, and other forms of reckoning with your experiences. These reflections are an opportunity for you to teach yourself something you don’t yet know that you know. Due 10/3, 10/30, 11/20. Credit / No Credit. 5% each.

Final Reflection: 5-7 page essay about storytelling as a social practice, based on your experiences and reading. You can use techniques of memoir and storytelling in this essay to develop your ideas and give them force. Guidelines will be distributed. Due December 14, noon, in my mailbox. 10%

Public Performances: The class will create the performance schedule during the semester. Performances may include events at Chum’s, campus dorms, Rapaporte Treasure Hall, Lemberg Children’s Center, BOLLI, Waltham Public Library, elementary or secondary classrooms in the Boston area, and other places. Our public performances will include formal events, open mic events organized by others, and storytelling workshops or games for children. Performances will be scheduled for a wide range of days and times to accommodate our different schedules; students are not required to attend every performance. Transportation tbd.
Attendance and Participation:
• Laptops may be used in class only for accessing relevant course materials on LATTE. If you use a laptop for other purposes (email, web browsing), you will be asked to leave the class and be considered absent for the day. Bring other materials (e.g., paper, pens) for taking notes.
• All assignments must be completed and submitted to receive course credit. Late work will be penalized by one plus/minus for each day past due date.
• Three unexcused absences lowers the final course grade by one plus/minus, and each additional absence by another plus/minus.
• Plagiarism will be penalized by failure on the assignment or course, appearance before a university committee, and/or expulsion.
• Students who wish to have reasonable accommodations made for documented disabilities or Brandeis athletic obligations should speak to me immediately.

Class Schedule:
Scheduled activities may change as our performance schedule develops.

Wednesday, 8/30
Opening stories—five theses on storytelling—opening creative brainstorm—opening logistical brainstorm.

Thursday, 8/31
Small group workshop

*Monday, 9/4: no class for Labor Day*

Wednesday, 9/6
*Moth Recommendation due, on LATTE*
Small group workshop

Thursday, 9/7
*Story for Friends/Family, with Written Reflection due in class*
*Proposal for Event assignment due: please email your proposal to me by 9:00 a.m.*
Performance planning

Monday, 9/11
Class performances

Wednesday, 9/13
Class performances

Thursday, 9/14
Class performances

Monday, 9/18
*Non-Biographical Story Recommendation*
Book talk: introduce your folktale anthology.
Reading and Discussion: Frank, Letting Stories Breath, Preface, Introduction and Ch. 1, "The Capacities of Stories.” Optional: Ch. 3, “Dialogical Narrative Analysis as a Method of Questioning” [LATTE]
**Wednesday, 9/20**  
Performance planning, Campus Pop Up. Rehearsal.

*Thursday 9/21: no class for Rosh Hashanah*

**Monday, 9/25**  
Performance planning, Campus Pop Up. Rehearsal.

**Wednesday, 9/27**  
Campus Pop Up Performances

**Thursday, 9/28**  
Campus Pop Up Performances

**Monday, 9/25**  
*Reflection on Storytelling 1 assignment due*  
Debrief, Campus Pop Up Performances.  

**Tue 10/4: Brandeis Thursday**  
Workshop

**Wednesday, 10/5**  
Workshop

*Thursday, 10/6: no class for Sukkot*

**Monday, 10/9**  
Workshop

**Wednesday, 10/11: Brandeis Thursday**  
Workshop

*Thursday 10/12: no class for Shmini Atzeret*

**Monday, 10/16**  
Workshop and performance preparation

**Wednesday, 10/18**  
Workshop and performance preparation

**Thursday, 10/19**  
Workshop and performance preparation

**Monday, 10/23**  
Workshop and performance preparation
Wednesday, 10/25
Workshop and performance preparation

Thursday, 10/26
Workshop and performance preparation

Monday, 10/30
*Reflection on Storytelling 2 assignment due*
Reading and Discussion: Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, ch. 3, “Some Psychodynamics of Orality”
and ch. 6, “Oral Memory, the Story Line, and Characterization” [LATTE]

Wednesday, 11/1
Workshop and performance preparation

Thursday, 11/2
Workshop and performance preparation

Monday, 11/6
Workshop and performance preparation

Wednesday, 11/8
Workshop and performance preparation

Thursday, 11/9
Workshop and performance preparation

Monday, 11/13
Performance preparation

Wednesday, 11/15
Performance preparation

Thursday, 11/16
Performance preparation

Monday, 11/20
*Reflection on Storytelling 3 assignment due*
Reading and Discussion: Booth, *The Company We Keep*, from “Appraising Character: Desire against Desire,” pp. 265-277 [LATTE]

*Wednesday, 11/22 and Thursday, 11/23: no classes for Thanksgiving*

Monday, 11/27
Performance preparation
**Wednesday, 11/29**  
Performance preparation

**Thursday, 11/30**  
Performance preparation

**Monday, 12/4**  
Workshop, Final Reflection assignment

**Wednesday, 12/6**  
Workshop, Final Reflection assignment

**Thursday, 12/7**  
Concluding stories — further theses on storytelling — notes toward the future.

**Thursday, December 14, noon, my mailbox: Final Reflections Due **