

## OLLI COURSE SYLLABUS: Theater and the Dynamic Outsider

Instructor: Hilary Roberts

### General Description

Playwrights often seize on the experience most of us feel at some juncture, of not belonging, and use it as inspiration for outsider opuses for the stage. “The vitality of the ordinary members of society is dependent on its Outsiders,” writes scholar Colin Wilson. Stories about people who are on the outs expand our understanding of the human condition. Through theatrical masterworks by August Wilson, William Shakespeare, Larry Kramer, and Susan Glaspell, we investigate forebears of today’s much-applauded disruptor mindset. We’ll discuss the scripts, view clips of scenes, and celebrate outlier heroes as endearing agents of change.

Week 1: Susan Glaspell’s *Trifles*. Early Twentieth Century wives, marginalized and outcast by chauvinistic husbands, reinvent justice in a taut, one-act domestic murder case. In this early feminist drama, even the props reinforce the outsider theme.

Weeks 2 and 3: Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1*: Henry IV battles rebellious outsiders in his kingdom and worse, suffers the absence of his profligate son, Prince Hal. But Hal transforms before our eyes from degenerate outsider to calculated insider, thereby securing the realm and making his father proud.

Week 4: August Wilson’s *Fences*. Troy Maxson’s wife, Rose, wants a fence built around her yard to keep her loved ones inside its safety zone, but Troy, tragically, heroically and ironically, remains the ultimate outsider at home, in the workplace, and even within reality.

Week 5: Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart*. During the AIDS crisis of the early 1980s one gay man, Ned Weeks, chooses to make an outsider of himself in a quest to shake up dangerously sluggish attitudes within his peer group and alter the course of a burgeoning catastrophe, no matter the required sacrifices.

Week 6: Where else do we find outsider drama we love? Bring in your thoughts about other relevant plays and teleplays that move you. We’ll share examples and concluding observations.

Hilary Roberts is an author, educator and editor who has taught at UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, and Contra Costa College. Her interests include critical thinking through literature, creative expression across genres, and writing about global issues. She holds an M.A. from University of Michigan and a Ph.D. from U.C. Berkeley, where she studied cognitive science in tandem with literature.