



# THE ROLE OF THE THEATRE CRITIC

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In the 21st century, we are living in a time of great change for criticism and the role of the critic. Previously, one negative review from the New York Times could close a Broadway show. Now the audience as critic is a topic of much debate. Are professional critics and informed opinions necessary? What is the power of the audience critic? What is the role of the critic and the role of criticism in today's theatre?

This unit will take students through a brief history of the theatre critic from the 500 reviews that came out of Ibsen's one-night performance of *Ghosts* in 1891, to the tumultuous landscape of social media criticism. Students will then apply what they've learned by writing on or theatricalizing the role of the critic in a culminating assignment.

## 1 - Introduction

In this introduction lesson, students will begin with terminology, discussion about their own knowledge and views, and try out the role of the critic in a low-stakes exercise. Is it possible to give an informed opinion about a crumpled up piece of paper?

## 2 - Critic Case Study: "A Dirty Act Done Publicly"

Students will continue to evaluate the role of the critic and the purpose of criticism. In this case study lesson, students will examine a 1891 production of Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghosts*. The single-night performance resulted in 500 reviews, many of which were negative and caustic.

## 3 - Dorothy Parker

Students will continue to evaluate the role of the critic and the purpose of criticism. In this case study lesson, students will examine a single critic from a specific era. In 1918, at 24 years old, Dorothy Parker became the drama critic for *Vanity Fair*. This was a time period when there were upwards of 80 Broadway theatres and over a hundred shows opened each year. It was also a post-war era where audiences were looking for release, and the wit and tone of Dorothy Parker's reviews were exactly what people were looking for. It also got her fired.

## 4 - Critic Case Study: The New York Times

Students will continue to evaluate the role of the critic and the purpose of criticism. In this case study lesson, students will examine the power of the New York Times drama critic in the mid to late 20th century. While there were many outlets reviewing shows, there was an ongoing mythology that a review from the New York Times had the power to keep a show running or close it. Students will discuss and infer if this is true. They will also reflect on the role of the critic who has such power.

## 5 - The 21st Century Critic: Culminating Assignment

We have now made it to the 21st century. The 21st century is a time of great change for criticism and the role of the theatre critic. There is the tumultuous world of social media criticism with both pros and cons. People consistently choose online options over print. The audience has become the critic. What does that mean for the professional critic? Do we need professional informed opinions of art in the 21st century? Are audience reviews as valuable as critic reviews? Students are given a variety of culminating assignment options in order to apply what they have learned throughout the unit.

# Standards Connections

## National Core Arts Standards

### Perceive and analyze artistic work - Grade 6

TH:Re7.1.6.a - Describe and record personal reactions to artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

### Perceive and analyze artistic work - Grade 7

TH:Re7.1.7.a - Compare recorded personal and peer reactions to artistic choices in a drama/ theatre work.

### Perceive and analyze artistic work - Grade 8

TH:Re7.1.8.a - Apply criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

### Perceive and analyze artistic work - Grade HS Proficient

TH:Re7.1.HSI.a - Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.

### Perceive and analyze artistic work - Grade HS Accomplished

TH:Re7.1.HSII.a - Demonstrate an understanding of multiple interpretations of artistic criteria and how each might be used to influence future artistic choices of a drama/theatre work.

### Perceive and analyze artistic work - Grade HS Advanced

TH:Re7.1.HSIII.a - Use historical and cultural context to structure and justify personal responses to a drama/theatre work.

### Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work - Grade 6

TH:Re8.1.6.c - Identify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in or observation of drama/ theatre work.

### Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work - Grade 7

TH:Re8.1.7.c - Interpret how the use of personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs can be used to discuss drama/theatre work.

### Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work - Grade 8

TH:Re8.1.8.a - Recognize and share artistic choices when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re8.1.8.c - Apply personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs to evaluate a drama/theatre work.

### Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work - Grade HS Proficient

TH:Re8.1.HSI.c - Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of a drama/theatre work.

### Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work - Grade 6

TH:Re9.1.6.a - Use supporting evidence and criteria to evaluate

TH:Re9.1.6.c - Identify a specific audience or purpose for a drama/theatre work.

### Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work - Grade 7

TH:Re9.1.7.b - Consider the aesthetics of the production elements in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re9.1.7.c - Identify how the intended purpose of a drama/theatre work appeals to a specific audience.

### Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work - Grade 8

TH:Re9.1.8.a - Respond to a drama/ theatre work using supporting evidence, personal aesthetics, and artistic criteria.

## Common Core

### Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with

diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3 - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

### Language

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.2 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

### Language

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

## California VAPA Standards (2019)

### 6.TH:Re7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

6.TH:Re7 - Describe and record personal reactions to artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

### 7.TH:Re7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

7.TH:Re7 - Compare recorded personal and peer reactions to artistic choices in a drama/ theatre work.

### 8.TH:Re7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

8.TH:Re7 - Apply appropriate criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

### Prof.TH:Re7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Prof.TH:Re7 - Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.

### Acc.TH:Re7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Acc.TH:Re7 - Demonstrate an understanding of multiple interpretations of artistic criteria and how each might be used to influence future artistic choices of a drama/theatre work.

### Adv.TH:Re7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Adv.TH:Re7 - Use historical and cultural context to structure and justify personal responses to a drama/theatre work.

### 6.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

6.TH.Re8.c - Identify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in or observation of drama/ theatre work.

### 7.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

7.TH.Re8.c - Interpret how the use of personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs can be used to discuss drama/theatre work.

### 8.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

8.TH.Re8.a - Recognize and share artistic choices when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.

8.TH.Re8.c - Apply personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs to evaluate a drama/theatre work.

### Prof.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Prof.TH.Re8.c - Understand how multiple aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs shape participation in and observation of a drama/theatre work.

### 6.TH:Re9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

6.TH.Re9.a - Use supporting evidence and criteria to

evaluate drama/theatre work.

6.TH.Re9.b - Identify a specific audience or purpose for a drama/theatre work.

#### **7.TH:Re9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.**

7.TH.Re9.b - Identify how the intended purpose of a drama/theatre work appeals to a specific audience.

7.TH.Re9.c - Analyze and evaluate the aesthetics of the technical theatre elements in a drama/theatre work.

#### **8.TH:Re9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.**

8.TH.Re9.a - Respond to a drama/ theatre work using supporting evidence, personal aesthetics, and artistic criteri

## **Florida Sunshine State Standards**

### **Critical Thinking & Reflection**

TH.912.C.1.3 - Justify a response to a theatrical experience through oral or written analysis, using correct theatre terminology.

TH.912.C.1.6 - Respond to theatrical works by identifying and interpreting influences of historical, social, or cultural contexts.

TH.912.C.1.7 - Justify personal perceptions of a director's vision and/or playwright's intent.

TH.912.C.1.8 - Apply the components of aesthetics and criticism to a theatrical performance or design.

### **Skills, Techniques & Processes**

TH.912.S.1.3 - Develop criteria that may be applied to the selection and performance of theatrical work.

TH.912.S.1.4 - Compare the artistic content as described by playwrights, actors, designers, and/or directors with the final artistic product and assess the success of the final artistic product using established criteria.

TH.912.S.3.1 - Articulate, based on research, the rationale for artistic choices in casting, staging, or technical design for a scene from original or scripted material.

## **Georgia Performance Standards 2017 - Theatre Arts**

### **Grade 6 - Responding**

TA6.RE.2 - Critique various aspects of theatre and other media., a. Identify the purpose of a critique., b. Evaluate a theatre production using an assessment instrument.

### **Grade 7 - Responding**

TA7.RE.2 - Critique various aspects of theatre and other media., a. Identify the benefits of constructive dramatic criticism., b. Apply performance rubrics to evaluate theatre and other media productions.

### **Grade 8 - Responding**

TA8.RE.2 - Critique various aspects of theatre and other media., a. Recognize the role of dramatic criticism in media production., b. Utilize specific criteria to articulate dramatic criticism., c. Apply principles of dramatic criticism as both an audience member and participant., d. Implement appropriate changes based on dramatic criticism.

### **Grades 9-12 - ACTING LEVELS I-IV - Responding**

TAHSA.RE.2 - Critique various aspects of theatre and other media using appropriate supporting evidence., a. Develop and utilize meaningful, structured criteria for assessing the work of an actor.

### **Grades 9-12 - FUNDAMENTALS OF THEATRE LEVELS I-IV - Responding**

TAHSFT.RE.2 - Critique various aspects of theatre and other

media using appropriate supporting evidence., a. Generate and use terminology for critiquing theatre presentations., b. Analyze performance and utilize various effective forms of criticism to respond to and/or improve performance.

### **Grades 9-12 - MUSICAL THEATRE LEVELS I-IV - Responding**

TAHSMT.RE.2 - Critique various aspects of theatre and other media using appropriate supporting evidence., a. Utilize constructive criticism, appropriate musical theatre terminology, and study of existing performance styles to modify and improve performance choices.

### **Grades 9-12 - TECHNICAL THEATRE LEVELS I-IV - Responding**

TAHSTT.RE.1 - Respond to technical elements of theatre using appropriate supporting evidence., a. Revise projects, plans, and/or procedures after peer criticism to improve development of technical elements., b. Identify and analyze the characteristics of different types of performance spaces and how they can influence production decisions (e.g. proscenium stage, studio/black box, thrust stage, classroom, arena, found space)., c. Evaluate design choices of professional designers., d. Evaluate design and technical elements in a post mortem following the completion of a theatre production.

## **North Carolina Essential Standards**

### **Intermediate High School Standards - Analysis**

I.A.1.2 - Evaluate the works of theatre artists for strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement.

### **Advanced High School Standards - Analysis**

A.A.1.2 - Critique performances of written texts based on a set of given criteria.

## **Tennessee Theatre Curriculum Standards**

### **GRADES 6-8**

6.0 Theatrical Presentation - The students will compare and incorporate art forms by analyzing methods of presentation and audience response for theatre, dramatic media (such as film, television, and electronic media), and other art forms

### **GRADES 9-12**

6.0 Theatrical Presentation - Students will compare and integrate art forms by analyzing traditional theatre, dance, music, visual arts, and new art forms.

## **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Theatre Arts**

### **MS 117.211 LI - Critical evaluation and response**

C.5.B - develop simple oral and written observations about the visual, aural, oral, and kinetic aspects of theatrical performances such as informal playmaking or formal theatre.

C.5.C - identify production elements of theatre, film, television, and other media.

### **MS 117.212 LII - Foundations: Inquiry and Understanding**

B.1.E - demonstrate knowledge of theatrical vocabulary and terminology.

### **MS 117.213 LIII - Foundations: Inquiry and Understanding**

B.1.E - apply knowledge of theatrical vocabulary and

terminology.

### **MS 117.213 LIII - Critical evaluation and response**

B.5.B - develop a knowledge of the terminology and process of evaluation such as intent, structure, effectiveness, and value and apply this process to performances using appropriate theatre vocabulary.

### **HS 117.315 LI - Critical evaluation and response**

C.5.D - evaluate live theatre in written and oral form with precise and specific observations using appropriate evaluative theatre vocabulary such as intent, structure, effectiveness, and value.

### **HS 117.316 LII - Critical evaluation and response**

C.5.D - evaluate the treatment of artistic elements such as theme, character, setting, and action in theatre, musical theatre, dance, art, music, or other media and integrate more than one art form in informal presentations.

### **HS 117.317 LIII - Critical evaluation and response**

C.5.C - apply the concepts of evaluation to performances and evaluate theatre, film, television, and other media with depth and complexity using appropriate vocabulary.

### **HS 117.318 LIV - Critical evaluation and response**

C.5.C - apply evaluation concepts to performances, and compare and contrast literary and dramatic criticism of theatre, film, television, or other media.

## **Alberta, Canada**

### **Junior Goal III Objectives**

develop awareness of various conventions of theatre

### **Junior Orientation**

focus concentration on one task at a time

listen effectively

meet deadlines and follow through on individual and group commitments

share ideas confidently with others

### **Junior Goal I Objectives**

develop the willingness to make a decision, act upon it and accept the results

### **Theatre Studies Level 1 - Beginning (performance analysis)**

2 - identify specific criteria to assess a presentation

3 - verbalize and write a review

### **Senior Goal III Objectives**

demonstrate the ability to assess critically the process and the art

### **Orientation Drama 10**

share ideas confidently

## **British Columbia (2018)**

### **GRADE 6 - ARTS - Exploring and creating**

Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental contexts in relation to the arts

Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through the arts

### **GRADE 6 - ARTS - Reasoning and reflecting**

Examine relationships between the arts and the wider world

Interpret works of art using knowledge and skills from various areas of learning

Reflect on works of art and creative processes to

understand artists' intentions

Research, describe, interpret and evaluate how artists (dancers, actors, musicians, and visual artists) use processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques, and environments in the arts

### **GRADE 6 - ARTS - Communicating and documenting**

Describe, interpret and respond to works of art and explore artists' intent

### **GRADE 7 - ARTS - Exploring and creating**

Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental contexts in relation to the arts

Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through the arts

### **GRADE 7 - ARTS - Reasoning and reflecting**

Interpret works of art using knowledge and skills from various areas of learning

Reflect on works of art and creative processes to understand artists' intentions

Research, describe, interpret and evaluate how artists (dancers, actors, musicians, and visual artists) use processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques, and environments in the arts

### **GRADE 7 - ARTS - Communicating and documenting**

Describe, interpret and respond to works of art

### **GRADE 8 - ARTS - Exploring and creating**

Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental contexts in relation to the arts

Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through arts activities and experiences

### **GRADE 8 - ARTS - Reasoning and reflecting**

Interpret works of art using knowledge and skills from various areas of learning

Reflect on works of art and creative processes to understand artists motivations and meanings

Respond to works of art using one's knowledge of the world

### **GRADE 8 - ARTS - Communicating and documenting**

Describe, interpret and respond to works of art

### **GRADE 9 - DRAMA - Exploring and creating**

Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental in relation to drama

Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through dramatic experiences

### **GRADE 9 - DRAMA - Reasoning and reflecting**

Describe, interpret, and evaluate how performers and playwrights use dramatic structures, elements, and techniques to create and communicate ideas

### **GRADE 10 - DRAMA - Reason and reflect**

Describe, analyze, and respond using drama-specific language

Examine the influences of social, cultural, historical, environmental, and personal context on drama

Reflect on dramatic experiences and how they relate to a specific place, time, and context

Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences

### **GRADE 11 - DRAMA - Reason and reflect**

Examine the influences of social, cultural, historical, environmental, and personal contexts on dramatic works

Reflect on aesthetic experiences and how they relate to a specific place, time, and context

Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences

**GRADE 11 - DRAMA - Communicate and document**

Document and respond to dramatic works and experiences in a variety of contexts

**GRADE 11 - DRAMA - Connect and expand**

Explore the impacts of dramatic works on culture and society

**GRADE 12 - DRAMA - Reason and reflect**

Evaluate the social, cultural, historical, environmental, and personal contexts of dramatic works

Reflect on aesthetic experiences and how they relate to a specific place, time, and context

Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences

**GRADE 12 - DRAMA - Connect and expand**

Examine the impacts of dramatic works on culture and society

## **Ontario, Canada**

**Grades 9 & 10 - Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing - The Critical Analysis Process**

B.1.2 - analyse a variety of drama works to compare and assess how they explore universal themes and issues (e.g., compare and contrast the handling of similar themes in dramatizations of folk tales, myths, legends, personal stories, and/or Aboriginal tales)

B.1.3 - identify aesthetic and technical aspects of drama works and explain how they help achieve specific dramatic purposes (e.g., write theatre or film reviews assessing whether the lighting, sound, set design, and costumes of a drama are used effectively to illustrate the intended message)