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DRAMA LEAGUE OF AMERICA

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*The Study of Drama
in the High School*

By ALICE HOWARD SPAULDING
January " 1913

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This article in briefer form was first published in the leaflets of
The New England Association of Teachers of English

The Study of Drama in the High School



HAVING always been extremely fond of the theater, and having retained in my memory delightful recollections of reading in school *The Merchant of Venice* and *Macbeth*, in preparation for seeing them produced, I was attracted during my college days to a course bearing the title, "History of the Drama." From the first day that I attended the course I found it a delight—and a wonder. Why had nobody in school ever told me that there had been other play-writers besides Shakspeare? Why had I never read Goldsmith, Sheridan, and others? With much hesitation, and ashamed of my disloyalty, I came to the conclusion that my course in high school, which I had deemed so broad, was peculiarly narrow. I wondered why it was.

Two years later I began to teach, and then I saw a few reasons why: there were so many other things to do; there was so much the tendency in the teaching of English to keep

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along the beaten path; there were so few books available; and there was so much of the old prejudice against anyone or anything connected with the stage. By frequent friendly talks with pupils then and since, I gradually learned much concerning their acquaintance with theatrical matters and their tastes; and I came to see that my own interest in the subject was the least important consideration. The schools which paid elaborate attention to instruction in the laws of embroidery, music, and art were doing nothing to inculcate in future citizens equally high standards of the drama. Boys, and sometimes girls, were going once a week, or oftener, to see vulgar musical comedies, lurid melodramas, or so-called "problem plays" with little or no claim to truth or artistic merit. If something really good came to town they stayed away; they inferred, from experience in school, that anything which could by any chance be called artistic or literary must be "something stupid that you picked to pieces," as one of my pupils once defined a classic. The parents of these pupils were no help either. They felt secure with a Shakspeare play, which they might attend with the feeling of performing a sacred duty, but beyond that they merely "knew what amused them."

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Here, then, was an opportunity which the school was failing to grasp: the theater, a powerful force in society, was being absolutely ignored, and the drama, containing some of the noblest work in all literature, was being treated as unworthy to take its place with the other arts.

Following these observations have succeeded five years of experimenting in the formulation of a course in the history and technique of the drama, which would meet the needs of high-school pupils. Even yet, the plan is not entirely satisfactory—but each class helps me to come a little nearer an adequate working plan, and each of the last three years I have enjoyed the inestimable privilege of courses in history of drama and playwriting under the instruction of Professor G. P. Baker, of Harvard, whose interest and co-operation have been of the greatest aid in all my problems. Without these courses, or their equivalent in individual research, I do not see how it is possible to do justice to work in the drama, an art which is so much misunderstood.

The course, as it stands at present, consists of two parts: I, History; II, Technique. These two parts, carried on partly by lectures,

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partly by class discussion have a threefold aim: (1) to give the students a cursory view of the development of the drama, and the forces contributing thereto, from the fifteenth century to the present; (2) to give the students enough knowledge of the technique of dramatic art to enable them to discriminate a little more correctly between what is true and beautiful and what is false and inartistic in the plays which they read or see; (3) to make them so much enjoy what is good that they will cease to be satisfied with anything lower. Hence, it is evident that the two subjects, while considered here under two separate heads, must be carried on more or less at the same time. The textbooks which can be used for systematizing and illustrating the subject are:

Mario Borsa, *The English Stage of Today* (Lane)

Clayton Hamilton, *The Theory of the Theater*

Montrose J. Moses, *American Dramatists*

Brander Matthews, *The Study of the Drama*
(Houghton Mifflin Co.)

Manly, *Specimens of Elizabethan Drama* (Ginn)

The "Belles Lettres Series" (Heath)

Certain volumes in "Everyman's Library"

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Dr. Elizabeth Woodbridge, *The Drama; Its Laws and Technique*

Dr. Alfred Hennequin, *The Art of Play-writing*

William Archer, *Play-making*

The plan of the course, accompanied by wide supplementary reading and frequent discussion of current plays as illustrative material, is as follows:

I. Technique: 1. *What Constitutes a Play.* 2. *Characterization*—Interest, Truth, Value of Characters, Variety and Contrast. 3. *Plot and Story*—Definition of Terms; Action, Exposition; Unity, Clearness, Emphasis, Proportion; Suspense, Climax, Interest. 4. *Dialogue*—Truth, Value, Interest. 5. *Theme*—Novelty, Interest, Fitness. 6. *Setting.* 7. *Kinds of Drama*—Comedy, Tragedy, Mediated Forms; or, Story Play, Character Play, Play of Ideas.

II. History: 1. Lectures on Classic Drama and Theater. 2. *Antigone, Agamemnon, or Medea,* and one comedy. 3. Lectures on Tropes and Miracles. 4. *Sacrifice of Isaac, Noah's Flood, and Secunda Pastorum.* 5. Lecture on Moralities. 6. Discussion of one ancient and one modern morality. 7. *Ralph Roister Doister.* 8. Lecture on Elizabethan Theater. 9. One play each of Lyly and Kyd; two of Christopher Marlowe. 10. Lecture on Shakspeare and his accomplishment. 11. Discussions of six plays of Shakspeare. 12. Lectures on Restoration Period,

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Heroic Drama, Great Actors. 13. Lecture on Goldsmith and Sheridan. 14. Two plays each of Goldsmith and Sheridan. 15. Lectures on Drama of Early Nineteenth Century: Romantic Period and Closet Drama. 16. One play each of Lytton, Tennyson, and Browning. 17. Lecture on Robertson and His Influence. 18. One play of Robertson. 19. Lectures on Modern Drama: Gilbert and Sullivan; Ibsen and His Influence; Pinero, Jones, Wilde, Shaw; The Irish and Manchester Movements; Theories of Reinhart and Craig. 20. One play of Ibsen. 21. One play each of Pinero, Jones, Wilde; two or three of Shaw, Yeats, Synge, and other modern writers. 22. A long paper: criticism of a current play, exposition of a movement in field of drama, or other assigned topic.

In adapting this outline to his own special case, the reader should bear in mind several points. In the first place, the outline is not followed rigidly: two lectures may be expanded to five, if the class is interested enough to interrupt and ask for the application of certain technical principles to a concrete case. The pupils' questions are always given precedence over the planned work, and the freest discussion of plays with which the class is acquainted is urged. The class may be one whose highest ideal is *Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl*; in which case the discussion

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starts with that as a basis. We look at the play honestly and without any spirit of derision to see where the plot is old, where the incidents are forced and unreal, where the characterization is inconsistent and untrue—or where, perchance, it is right. Under no circumstances is any individual's opinion ridiculed, even though he may rate nameless melodramatists on a plane with the immortal William. By thus giving each pupil confidence in his own judgment, we get the frankest statement of tastes. And one of the delights to the person conducting the course is to observe the gradual—and unconscious—change of the pupils' tastes, as manifested in the written papers or personal conversations. Finally, the plays discussed formally in class represent but a small portion of the pupil's reading. The supplementary reading, however, I do not take into consideration at all in marking the pupils. They understand that it is for pleasure and to furnish a source from which they may choose plays for frequent written discussions. Of course, too, the reports, consisting merely of the amount read each week, serve the instructor as a sort of thermometer for measuring the enthusiasm. It is the rare pupil who does not report at least four extra hours a week.

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The written criticisms I consider of the utmost importance to the students as a means of clarifying their thought; and I find that the students themselves agree with me, since their comments on last year's course expressed almost unanimous desire that the number of review papers and essays discussing the problems in technique be increased. These criticisms, from four to twelve pages in length, are generally built more or less closely around the following outline, which I dictate early in the course. This scheme the pupils may apply to any play which they read or see within the next twenty-four hours. They realize that the outline is merely suggested as a help, and is not intended to hamper or restrict them; so, as their knowledge and discrimination increases, their own individuality covers the bones of the skeleton more and more adequately.

OUTLINE FOR DRAMATIC CRITICISM

I. *Characterization*

1. Are the characters types or individuals?
 2. Are they equally interesting? true to life? necessary?
 3. Is there contrast and variety among them?
 4. What rôles offer special opportunity to the actor?
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II. *Plot and Story*

1. Statement of Plot (Formula: A desires to accomplish but is opposed by B. The result is X)
2. Interest and novelty
 - a) of material
 - b) of treatment
3. Clearness
 - a) Exposition
 - b) Action
4. Emphasis or Proportion—Right or Wrong
 - a) Plots
 - b) Incidents
 - c) Exposition and Action
5. Unity
6. Contrast and Variety
7. Suspense and Climax
8. Dénouement—is it inevitable result of what has preceded?

III. *Dialogue*

1. Interest
2. Truth to Life
3. Value—is it useful or merely literary?

IV. *Theme*

1. Appeal—is it general or special?
 2. Novelty and Timeliness
 3. Ethical Value
 4. Dramatist's Attitude toward Theme—is it partisan?
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V. *Setting, or Environment*

1. Degree of Interest
2. Relation of Setting to Plot and Characters
3. Devices for Acquainting Audience with Setting

VI. *Classification of Play, and Arguments Therefor*

VII. General Remarks

1. Interest, Novelty, Literary Merit of Play as Whole
2. Relative Importance of Plot, Character, and Dialogue
3. Timeliness, Truth to Life, Ethical Importance
4. Acting Parts

This outline indicates also the line of thought followed in general in the class discussions. Of course, there come in all sorts of related questions the discussion of which we never postpone, for they are generally suggested by some interested student. Some of those raised last year were: What is there in *Everyman* which makes it grip even a modern audience? Wherein lies Shakspeare's superiority as a dramatist over his contemporaries? What is there in *The School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* which makes them still so popular? Why were Tennyson's and Browning's plays

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failures when produced? Could not a good play be made out of *The Lady of Lyons* if a less sentimental writer did it over? Is it true that Ibsen is an immoral writer? What makes a play moral or immoral? Don't you think Wilde's wit is very self-conscious? Are Shaw's later plays as good technically as his earlier ones?

There is another way in which the technical side of the work may be made to appeal to the more enthusiastic pupils. At the beginning I say to the class that if there are any who would like to try their hand at writing a one-act play, I shall be glad to help them. I urge nobody to write—the attempt must be voluntary—but I get some very interesting results. Of course, the greatest difficulty is to dissuade the more ambitious from a five-act tragedy in the Shaksperian mode, so confident are they at first. The first year in which the opportunity was offered I received one long morality in blank verse and a delightful little mediaeval drama also in verse; but these were the work of two very unusual girls and do not by any means represent the average. The following year I received a farce which was presented by the seniors at their annual social. It was crude, of course, but it compared favorably

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with many which we have obtained from the play-dealers; and the important point was that the author learned a vast deal about drama construction in the writing, revising, and rehearsing of his own little play. The next year I received three plays, one of which was revised, and given at the senior social. Last year I had a little humorous play in the morality mode, interesting for its atmosphere. This sort of work is, of course, done entirely out of class by means of conferences with the teacher.

I am aware that some of my co-laborers in this very exigent field are beginning to wonder how I manage to get this amount of time to spend on an "extra." In the first place, I do not consider the work an extra, but, rather, of prime importance; in the second, I am merely concentrating my attention for four or five months on a subject which, in most schools, is treated four or five times, one month at a time, during the four years. Moreover, assuming that out of the forty months available we devote fifteen to rhetoric and composition and twenty-five to literature, it does not seem to me disproportionate to spend four consecutive months in hard study of drama, when we have twenty-one remaining to devote to the novel,

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the essay, and poetry. In detail, however, the four years' course in literature is arranged as follows:

FRESHMAN YEAR. First half—Gayley's *Classic Myths and Old Testament Narratives*; second half—American Literature and one Shakspeare comedy. The pupils' attention is directed to the story, the characterization, the comic relief, and the beautiful poetry, some of which is committed to memory. The pupils grow very much interested in planning stage sets and costumes and in deciding how certain scenes should be acted, drawing the evidence for their arguments from the text. Again, as in *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, they like to know that it was probably written for a wedding celebration, and to find out for themselves the various ways in which Shakspeare has handled his material to suit the occasion. In this way they come to perceive the right emphasis of the plots and the purpose that each serves. Here, too, of course, will enter inevitably questions and discussion concerning the comparative merits of this and other plays which they have seen.

SOPHOMORE YEAR. Rapid readings illustrating the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Sheridan's *Rivals* and

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Goldsmith's two plays are suited to this year and may be read with sufficient thoroughness in ten recitations, studying especially emphasis of plot, type-figures, and varying excellence of dialogue.

JUNIOR YEAR. The nineteenth-century poets and novelists.

SENIOR YEAR. Burke for five weeks; Milton for six weeks; and Shakspeare, who is treated merely as one—even if the most important—figure in the development of the drama. His work is illustrated by pretty careful study of the three tragedies listed among the college requirements, and more rapid reading of three of the comedies. In all we spent about four months.

Some, doubtless, wonder how we get along with so little attention to the philological side of the text. It seems to me that the teaching of literature is a matter of proportion and of judicious omission. I suppose that much of the text does go by my pupils without their succeeding in grasping its full meaning, but that disturbs me little. Of course, matters of text that affect the pupil's appreciation of the play as a whole must be explained; but I prefer to omit minute dissection and devote my time to making the pupils so interested

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in the book or play that they will care to read it over and over, finding for themselves more perfect understanding with each reading. Indeed, I measure the value of the course to the special class chiefly by the degree of my success in accomplishing this purpose; also by the amount of supplementary reading done and the independence of the comments thereupon; by the degree of the pupils' ability to discuss intelligently, in writing, any drama from their outside reading; by their eagerness to discuss the subject with me and with each other, and, finally, by their comments on what they have gained or failed to gain from the course as a whole or in part. As a matter of fact, my classes are my severest critics in the matter of the efficiency of the course. They know perfectly well when I have handled a point in such a way that they fail to get the most from it, and they tell me so with perfect courtesy—and frankness, both of us understanding that it is for the sake of the next year's class. This feeling of responsibility for the success of the experiment is one of the things which I work hard to rouse at the beginning of the course; and the assistance I have gained from past students has been invaluable.

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BOOKS OF REFERENCE

<i>The English Stage of Today,</i>	Mario Borsa
<i>American Dramatists,</i>	Montrose J. Moses
<i>The Theory of the Theater,</i>	Clayton Hamilton
<i>The Study of the Drama,</i>	Brander Matthews
<i>The Drama: Its Law and Technique,</i>	Elizabeth Woodbridge
<i>The Art of Play-writing,</i>	Alfred Hennequin
<i>Play-making,</i>	William Archer

PLAYS

(* Signifies for use only in classes beyond high-school age)

* <i>Agamemnon,</i>	Aeschylus
<i>Antigone,</i>	Sophocles
* <i>Medea,</i>	Euripides
<i>Sacrifice of Isaac</i>	
<i>Noah's Flood</i>	
<i>Secunda Pastorum</i>	
<i>Everyman</i>	
<i>Ralph Roister Doister,</i>	N. Udall
<i>Endimion, or</i>	John Lyly
<i>Alexander and Campaspe</i>	
<i>The Spanish Tragedy,</i>	Thomas Kyd
<i>The Jew of Malta,</i>	Christopher Marlowe
<i>Tamburlaine</i>	
<i>Macbeth,</i>	William Shakspere
* <i>Hamlet, or</i>	
* <i>Othello, or</i>	
* <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	
<i>Henry V</i>	

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- Merchant of Venice*
The Tempest, or
As You Like It
**Much Ado About Nothing, or*
**Taming of the Shrew*
Midsummer-Night's Dream
**Love and Honor, or* William D'Avenant
The Siege of Rhodes
**Aurengzebe, or* John Dryden
The Conquest of Granada
The Critic, or R. B. Sheridan
**The School for Scandal*
The Rivals
The Good-Natured Man, Oliver Goldsmith
She Stoops to Conquer
Caste, T. W. Robertson
Virginius, Sheridan Knowles
Richelieu, or Bulwer-Lytton
The Lady of Lyons
Masks and Faces, Read & Taylor
The Cup, or Alfred Tennyson
The Falcon, or
The Foresters
**Queen Mary, or*
**Harold, or*
**Becket*
**Colombe's Birthday, or* Robert Browning
Strafford, or
**The Blot on the Scutcheon, or*
In a Balcony
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- **Chastelard*, or A. C. Swinburne
- **Mary Stuart*
The Silver King, Henry Arthur Jones
The Case of Rebellious Susan, or
The Manoeuvres of Jane
- **Mrs. Dane's Defense*
The Magistrate, or A. W. Pinero
The Cabinet Minister
- **Sweet Lavender*, or
- **The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*
The Princess and the Butterfly
You Never Can Tell, G. B. Shaw
Arms and the Man
The Devil's Disciple
Caesar and Cleopatra
- **Candida*
Captain Brassbound's Conversion
- **Major Barbara*
The Dark Ladie of the Sonnets
Fanny's First Play
The Importance of Being Earnest, Oscar Wilde
Herod, Stephen Phillips
- **Paolo and Francesca*
Strife, John Galsworthy
- **Justice*
The Land of Heart's Desire, W. B. Yeats
- **Countess Cathleen*
Cathleen Ni Houlihan
The Hour Glass
The Shadow of the Glen, J. M. Synge
Riders to the Sea
-

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<i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	
<i>The Birthright,</i>	T. C. Murray
<i>Seven Short Plays,</i>	Lady Gregory
* <i>Nan,</i>	John Masefield

PLAYS (AMERICAN)

<i>The Witching Hour,</i>	Augustus Thomas
* <i>As a Man Thinks</i>	
<i>The Faith Healer,</i>	W. V. Moody
* <i>The Great Divide</i>	
<i>Jeanne D'Arc,</i>	Percy Mackaye
<i>The Scarecrow</i>	
* <i>Tomorrow</i>	
<i>The Servant in the House,</i>	C. R. Kennedy
<i>The Winter Feast</i>	
<i>Everywoman,</i>	Walter Browne
* <i>Marlow,</i>	J. P- P. Marks
<i>The Piper</i>	

PLAYS (CONTINENTAL)

<i>Le Cid,</i>	Corneille
<i>Athalie,</i>	Racine
<i>L'Avare,</i>	Molière
<i>Le Misanthrope</i>	
<i>Les Femmes Savantes</i>	
<i>Les Precieuses Ridicules</i>	
<i>Ruy Blas,</i>	Victor Hugo
<i>Hernani</i>	
<i>Les Romanesques,</i>	E. Rostand
<i>La Princesse Lointaine</i>	
<i>L'Aiglon</i>	

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<i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i>	
<i>L'Oiseau Bleu,</i>	M. Maeterlinck
<i>An Enemy of the People,</i>	H. Ibsen
<i>Pillars of Society</i>	
<i>Peer Gynt</i>	
<i>The Lady from the Sea</i>	
* <i>The Doll's House</i>	
* <i>Ghosts</i>	
<i>Egmont,</i>	Goethe
<i>Iphigenia auf Tauris</i>	
<i>Wilhelm Tell,</i>	Schiller
<i>Jungfrau von Orleans</i>	
<i>Maria Stuart</i>	
<i>Nathan der Weise,</i>	Lessing
<i>Minna von Barnhelm</i>	
<i>The Far-Away Princess,</i>	Sudermann
<i>Thea</i>	
* <i>Heimath (Magda)</i>	
<i>The Sunken Bell,</i>	Hauptmann
<i>Hannele</i>	

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