

Instructor: Gaven D. Trinidad
Contemporary Playwrights of Color – Spring 2017
Online Writing Assignment Samples

[You will be required to compose short online writing assignments on Moodle. All responses must be between 170 to 200 words (no more, no less). If you citing books or academic articles, your works cited list does not count towards the words requirement; only the number of words in the main body of the text will be considered.]

Example 1: Dramaturgy Based-Questions - Choose a theme from the musical *Hamilton* and discuss its relevancy to the diaspora of black and brown communities in the United States. (NOTE: Always follow MLA citation rules.)

Lin Manuel Miranda’s hip-hop musical *Hamilton* is a close examination of the experiences of people of color in contemporary America. Miranda’s opening song “Alexander Hamilton” addresses the vilification of young black and brown men. Hamilton’s opposing political opponent, Aaron Burr, opens the show in disbelief: “How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore... dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean... impoverished, in squalor grow up to be a hero and a scholar?” (Miranda 16). Burr’s doubt of Hamilton’s political and personal success roots itself in his prejudice against Hamilton’s “low-income,” “fatherless,” and “immigrant” background. As argued by scholar Victor M. Rio, this “labeling is not just a process whereby schools, police, probation officers, and families stigmatize [black and brown] boys... [but] also a process by which agencies of social control further stigmatize and mark [these] boys in response to their original label” despite the accomplishments and social mobility they may have made (Rios 45). It’s not a coincidence that Miranda requires that the cast of *Hamilton* are to be almost entirely performers of color. It’s a political decision that challenges the stereotypes that plague and are forced upon black and brown men in the U.S.

Works Cited

Miranda, Lin-Manuel. *Hamilton: The Revolution*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016.
Rio, Victor M. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: NYU Press, 2011.

Example 2: Reflection Question – Write a reflection in regards to our discussion of Suzan-Lori Parks’ play *Venus*. Share how the material may have challenged your way of thinking or learning.

As a Biology student, I have faced a challenging time understanding the complex relationship between political theater and my own discipline. However, the class has given me time to reflect how biology and all the sciences have been used to justify racial discrimination in the United States and in Western Europe. During our discussion of the construction of the concept of “race” in the U.S., we talked about how the sciences were used to justify racial differences through the study of eugenics. The sciences were also misused to discriminate against other marginalized communities, such as differently abled folk, LGBTQIA+ communities, and those who have mental health concerns. As we were reading *Venus* by Suzan-Lori Parks, I couldn’t help but reflect how the sciences were complicit in the normalization of negative stereotypes and the hyper sexualization of black and brown women; ideas and images that are still perpetuated today. It’s difficult not to ponder how the sciences, such as Biology, have played vital roles in shaping these stereotypes. Parks’ investigation as a black woman playwright into these issues have influenced me to reflect what I can do to change the discourse of “race” and “identity” in the field of Biology not only as a major, but also as an ally to people of color and as a white woman.