

Opening the Gates: Using OER to Provide Access
to Theatre for Non-Theatrical Students and
Practitioners

Carl L Sage
Music and Theatre Programs
Fort Hays State University
Hays, KS USA

Inspiration

- I came into academia after working within the freelance world and interacting with individuals having a variety of levels of experiences with the arts. It was, in fact, experiences touring in underserved communities that inspired me to want to teach.

One of the classes that I currently teach is what the state of Kansas generally refers to as a “theatre appreciation” course. It is a General Education course at the 100 level, opening it to all majors across the university. The existing standard texts for such courses, however, tend to be written less for a general audience and more for an entry level audience within the theatrical discipline. Based both on my own observations as well as student feedback, I realized that there needed to be a better option.

Theory

- My basic inspirations were – at their core – the following concepts:
 1. The idea espoused by Russian theorist Anatoly Lunacharsky that what is needed is an “art of five kopecks”. An art that can be afforded by all.
 2. The oft mistranslated statement by Konstantin Stanislavski that “one cannot eat an entire turkey in one go, one must eat it in little ‘beats’ ” (ie bites).
 3. The classic statement by Peter Brook that “All that is needed for an act of theatre is an actor, an audience member, and an empty space.”
 4. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry statement "Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."

Process

- I began by working through what was core to the form, to the nature of what I called “The Storytelling Art”. These were items which I had been already including within my lectures and class discussions. I then winnowed and pared down any potentially extraneous jargon that might serve as a potentially barrier to those who were not devotees of the discipline.
- I did tailor the text towards my course structure, though I attempted to follow the seemingly logical progression of actor, author, designer in how I built my initial chapters. Additional chapters on production, history and theory built out from there.
- I used the university’s available publishing system via Pressbooks. The current result can be seen here:

<https://fhsu.pressbooks.pub/thtr120/front-matter/introduction/>

Usages – Current & Future

- I rolled out the current iteration of the text in the Fall of 2024. I made it available to my students via Pressbooks, as well as directly within my course shell(s) – both on campus and online course sections – of my Introduction to Theatre class, in PDF and EPUB formats. The responses were favorable, especially as compared to prior semesters relative to cost.
- I also shared copies with several high school teachers at the 2025 Kansas State Thespian Festival in Wichita in January 2025. Most of them seemed intrigued by the idea of a textbook that they could potentially share with students and family volunteers at no cost to familiarize them with what theatre is, and potentially help them develop needed vocabulary.

THANK YOU

Questions should be addressed to: clsage2@fhsu.edu