Legal trials, like plays, have actors, dialogue, audiences, and special spaces for their performances. More importantly, they both expose and give shape to the tensions that exist within society (between individual and state, parent and child, sacred and secular) and let us watch as actors struggle to resolve these conflicts: to transform negative energy into positive, or to raise a voice against oppression. To understand how the two kinds of drama re-enact these tensions, this course will begin with the idea of theater as "the arena where a living confrontation takes place." We will consider the origins and purpose of theater and the dramatic strategies used by both drama and trial alike; the way both manipulate, even reinterpret, stories and to what end; how certain kinds of drama seek to bring about spiritual transformation and even cultural revolution, while the trial, though using similar techniques, seeks to maintain cultural and political stability. Selections from the work of the most influential modern theater directors, including Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, and Peter Brook, will provide background on the nature of theater, with particular attention to the challenges of modern theater, and insights into the role of theater and trial in modern society.

Readings: three versions of the Antigone story (Sophocles’ Antigone (ca. 442 BC), Jean Anouilh’s Antigone (Paris, 1944), and Athol Fugard’s The Island (1972), set in South Africa during Apartheid); Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice; the story of Joan of Arc (trial record (1431), George Bernard Shaw’s Saint Joan (1923), and Dreyer’s 1928 silent film, The Passion of Joan of Arc; trial unit (possibly early first amendment cases; trial of the Chicago Seven); selections from Antonin Artaud’s The Theatre and its Double, Grotowski’s Towards a Poor Theatre, and Peter Brook’s The Empty Space.

Close readings of texts will be emphasized. Class presentations, response exercises, and 2-3 short papers will be required.