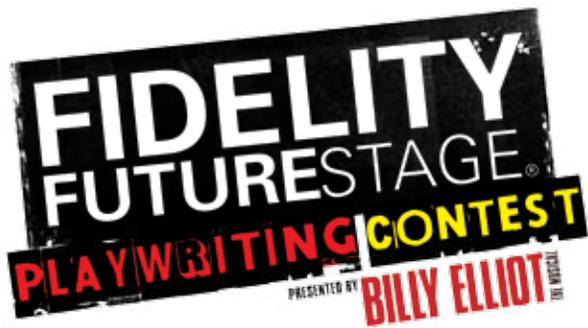


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**PLAYWRITING CONTEST**  
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**CURRICULUM GUIDE**



## Fidelity FutureStage Curriculum Guide

Created by



### Owner, Producing Director

#### PHILIP KATZ

Philip Katz owns Broadway Theatrical and has worked in the Broadway industry for the past 20 years as a marketing and development consultant. A few of his current and recent shows include *Shrek The Musical*, *West Side Story*, *Legally Blonde*, *Hairspray*, *The Opera Show* (U.K.) *Chicago*, *Grease*, *Victor/Victoria*, *Smokey Joe`s Cafe*, *Big The Musical*, *Applause* (starring Stephanie Powers) and *Busker Alley* (starring Tommy Tune). Under the banner of Thru The Stage Door, Katz provides cutting-edge interactive study guides and experiential workshops for shows Philip was also the Associate Producer for the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope, Pennsylvania, one of America's most famous summer theatres. Partial credits include: *Mame* starring Linda Dano, *Gypsy* starring Joyce DeWitt, *Hello, Dolly!* starring Colleen Zenk Pinter, *Love Letters* starring Loretta Swit, *My Way* starring Adrian Zmed and *My Fair Lady* starring Peter Scolari, Philip is an advocate for arts in education and is an active member of the Broadway League serving on both the education and marketing committees.

### Vice President, Marketing and Operations

#### BETSY BRAUN

Betsy Braun is a seasoned media, marketing and public relations professional with over 25 years experience in the entertainment business. Ms. Braun has worked extensively in television production and development, marketing and research, promotion and product integration for national media companies. For Broadway Theatrical, Ms. Braun develops strategic and targeted marketing programs involving both traditional and digital media, to maximize brand/product awareness and engagement for educational and theatrical projects. Ms. Braun is also a Digital Marketing Consultant working with companies to navigate the new digital and social media landscape. Prior to working with Broadway Theatrical, Ms. Braun was VP, Programming and Development for NBC Television in New York overseeing the development, marketing and day-to-day production of syndicated talk shows, "The John Walsh Show" and "The Jane Pauley Show." In addition, Ms. Braun served as Director of Programming at Warner Bros TV, and VP of Research and Programming for Universal Television in Los Angeles.

### Director of Creative Development

#### MICHAEL NAYLOR

Michael Naylor is a graduate of the Temple University School of Communications and Theatre. Having spent over two decades working in professional theatre as a press representative and graphic artist, Michael previously served as the Director of Marketing and Communications for the historic Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope, Pennsylvania. He has had the distinct pleasure of working with such celebrities as William Shatner, Edie Adams, Colleen Zenk Pinter, Linda Dano, Andrea McArdle and Audra McDonald to name just a few. Prior to joining Broadway Theatrical, Michael served as the Art Director for Camp Broadway.

### Director of Education

#### ROD CHRISTENSEN

Rod Christensen is the Director of Education at TADA! in New York City. Rod worked as Program Director at One on One NYC/LA (a studio for professional actors seeking to build their careers) where he was responsible for all aspects of program development. Before moving to NYC, Rod worked at Canada's prestigious Shaw Festival (the second largest repertory theater company in North America) where he worked as Senior Manager, Education developing numerous Arts Education programs and theatre-related workshops for school groups and adult audiences. In terms of past experience, Rod served as: elementary/high school teacher (music and drama); department head of a creative arts program for adults with developmental disabilities; and performer with the international, educational outreach program *Up With People!* Rod holds a Master's of Education, a Bachelor's of Music in Education, and a diploma in business management and leadership skills.

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# Playwriting: Curriculum Expectations

This playwriting curriculum is divided into four parts offering students opportunities to explore various aspects and skill levels of playwriting. In the following four lessons, students will...

## 1. Differentiate a play from a TV show, a movie, and a novel by:

- Exploring how plays tell a story through the artistry and interpretive skills of acting using dialogue, gestures, and symbols;
- Utilizing writing skills in character development through the use of dramatic structure, given circumstance, and background information;
- Learning how a play depends on the action of a protagonist and the consequences inherent within these actions/decisions;

## 2. Implement the techniques of playwriting that incorporate various stage/playwriting terminology, reading exercises, creative writing activities, improvisation, character development, and scene work.

## 3. Gain an enhanced understanding of the creative process and artistic opportunities of writing for the stage.

## 4. Establish the necessary knowledge and skills to write a 10-minute, one-act play.

Level: Grade 7 - 12

Subjects: Creative Writing, Drama, English

Throughout this 4-part curriculum, four subheadings are used:

- **Instructional Insights**
- **Teacher Tip**
- **Extension**
- **Variation**

These subheadings indicate notable tips and supplemental information that teachers can draw upon to:

- 1) enhance their own literary and drama-based knowledge or
- 2) enrich the lessons themselves.

**Note:** With the amount of information provided in this playwriting curriculum, teachers could divide each lesson by two. This would expand the curriculum from four to eight lessons.

# New York City Department of Education Blueprint for teaching and learning in Theater

Below are the Grade 12 expectations and guidelines for the NYC DOE Theater Making: Playwriting/Play Making curriculum. While the following four lessons cannot possibly meet every curriculum expectation at the Grade 12 level, many curricular connections are made. These connections are highlighted in bold.

Benchmarks for Grade 12

- ✓ **Students develop their ability as playwrights in a variety of theatrical styles and forms.**
- ✓ **Students explore personal voice and individual expression by applying diverse conventions of dramatic writing to their original work.**
- ✓ **Student playwrights extend and revise their written work guided by peer assessments and self-assessment.**
- ✓ **Students refine their ability as playwrights to express point of view and personal vision.**

## Understanding Dramatic Structure

Plot/Structure

Students will be able to:

- ✓ **Understand and apply the vocabulary and elements of dramatic structure in their writing, including:**
  - inciting moment
  - internal and external conflict
  - climax
  - resolution
  - character intentions
  - actions
  - obstacles
  - subtext
- ✓ **Understand and apply a variety of theatrical styles in writing and improvisation, including:**
  - realism, such as *Fences* by August Wilson
  - magic realism, such as *Marisol* by Jose Rivera
  - abstract realism, such as *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett
  - docudrama, such as *Execution of Justice* by Emily Mann
  - musical theater, such as *Guys and Dolls* by Frank Loesser
- ✓ **Understand and apply in writing and improvisation various theatrical forms including:**
  - poetry, such as *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered...* by Ntozake Shange
  - unity of time, place, and action, such as *'night, Mother* by Marsha Norman
  - ensemble plays, such as *Fires in the Mirror* by Anne Deavere Smith
  - linear narrative, such as *Brighton Beach Memoirs* by Neil Simon
  - their own imaginative original forms
- ✓ **Recognize, understand, and apply various theatrical conventions in writing and improvisation, including:**
  - narration
  - chorus
  - masks
  - ritual
  - flashbacks
  - play within a play

Character

Students will be able to:

- ✓ **Create and write vivid, complex, and well-rounded characters through a process of investigation and pre-writing activities.**
- ✓ **Demonstrate an understanding of characters' emotional wants, needs, intentions, motivations, actions, and inner life.**

## Understanding Dramatic Structure (cont'd)

### Character

Students will be able to:

- ✓ **Demonstrate an understanding of psychology of characters, and how social, historical, cultural and economic forces inform their choices.**
- ✓ **Demonstrate an understanding of the distinct qualities and contrasts between characters in plays as reflected in their language and exposition.**

### Sequencing/Setting

Students will be able to:

- ✓ **Demonstrate a command of rising action, climax, resolution, and the dramatic arc of a play.**
- ✓ **Demonstrate an understanding of various sequencing devices used in dramatic writing, including overlapping, simultaneous action, fragmentation, repetition, reversal of action, jump cuts, and unison and multiple actions.**

## Imagination, Analysis and Process

### Imagination and Analysis

Students will be able to:

- ✓ **Articulate as playwrights the personal meaning and importance of their own original work, including their goals, choices and vision.**
- ✓ **Articulate the cultural, historical, and social context of their original work and a clear state of purpose and theme.**
- ✓ **Demonstrate curiosity and imagination in expressing personal ideas, perspectives, and social views in their own original written work.**
- ✓ **Use the critical and creative thinking skills of analyzing, synthesizing, imagining, and elaborating on information and research to generate ideas, concepts, and choices from written work.**
- ✓ **Use literary devices to enhance their dramatic writing, including metaphor, simile, imagery, symbolism, foreshadowing, and circular construction.**
- ✓ **Make choices that are clear, specific, detailed and integrated to produce a unified dramatic text.**

### Writing/Literacy Processes

Students will be able to:

- ✓ **Write monologues, scenes, one-act and full-length plays in script format that conforms to proper usage and grammar guidelines.**
- ✓ **Write original work drawn from or inspired by a variety of source material, including literature, history, current events, music, poetry, interviews, themes, and their own imaginations.**
- ✓ **Write original work in a variety of theatrical styles and forms through a process of inventing, analyzing, and revising.**
- ✓ **Write vivid, complex, and well-rounded characters drawn from or inspired by a variety of source materials.**
- ✓ **Create and write inventive and detailed settings and stage directions that contribute to the action and theme of a scene or a play.**
- ✓ **Use acquired information and research to inform their writing.**
- ✓ **Revise, refine, and extend a written project from first to final draft over a sustained period of time.**
- ✓ **Create organizational plans necessary for producing readings, workshops, and performances of original student writing.**
- ✓ **Evaluate, assess, and critique their work and that of their peers in a productive and respectful way.**
- ✓ **Integrate the following elements into a unified written text:**
  - text
  - sound
  - music
  - design
  - movement
  - film/video and media technology

# LESSON #1

## Creating Dialogue thru Improvisation and Creative Writing

By participating in improvisation and creative writing exercises, students will create short, quick scenes of dialogue that incorporate the basics of playwriting; its historical and structural elements; and the initial stages of character development.

In these activities, students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of subtext, motivation, and status in the development of a character
- demonstrate an understanding of the function of the playwright in the development of an original scene or dramatic presentation
- learn about and define key terminology used in playwriting
- identify, sort, and order main ideas and supporting details for writing tasks, using a variety of strategies

Required materials/resources:

Writing paper, pens/pencils

Classroom set-up:

Open, cleared space for students to explore the process of script writing through the techniques of movement, acting, and creative writing exercises

## Instructional Insight

### Ancient Times

Almost 2500 years ago, the philosopher Aristotle, who was essentially the first drama critic and the first teacher of playwriting, proposed guidelines for writing a tragedy. In order to create a well-made play, the playwright should employ three main elements:



**ARISTOTLE**  
(b.) 384 - (d.) 365 BC

1. The Tragic Hero – A tragic hero is a man of high birth or position, or in most ways superior to other men. As the play unfolds, however, the tragic hero creates his own inevitable downfall through a tragic flaw in his character. The tragic hero begins the play in ignorance of key information, but as the play progresses, his knowledge expands, and his fortunes decline towards his inevitable doom.
2. The Three Unities – In Aristotle’s view, a tragedy must imitate or unite with real-life experience in terms of time, place and action. To create a unity of time, a play should take as long for the actors to perform as it would take to occur in reality. To create a unity of place, the setting should remain the same throughout the play, so that the audience is not expected to view different imaginary locations. To create a unity of action, a play should concentrate on a single plot or storyline.
3. Catharsis – The function of tragedy, according to Aristotle, is to create feelings of pity and fear in the audience – pity for the characters and fear that similar events might happen in real life. The audience’s experience of these emotions, called catharsis, is intended to purge or cleanse the audience’s desire for violence and aggression in their own lives.

Aristotle also began to categories plays into types (i.e., drama and comedy).

## 1800s - 1950s

As the 19th century began, a new literary movement called romanticism emerged in Germany, which emphasized individualism, subjective expression, and imagination. In theater the romantics rejected neoclassic strictures, especially those of French drama, including the Aristotle's three unities, the strict separation of genres, and conventional motivation by reason and ethics. The most popular form of drama in the early 19th century featured elements of romanticism, including an interest in emotion and spectacle as well as a disregard for the rules of neoclassicism. This form was the melodrama, in which authors manipulated events and emotions with little regard for logic or character.

Even as romanticism achieved its greatest successes in the French theater, prolific playwright Eugène Scribe was developing another type of drama that ultimately proved more influential. Scribe, the author of more than 300 plays, perfected what came to be called the well-made play. In it, Scribe carefully prepared the audience for the emotions he sought to elicit, arranged incidents in a cause-and-effect sequence, built in suspense as well as surprising reversals, and structured climaxes precisely.

*The formula for the well made play is so easy that I give it for the benefit of any reader who feels tempted to try his hand at making the fortune that awaits all successful manufacturers in this line. First, you "have an idea" for a dramatic situation. If it strikes you as a splendidly original idea, whilst it is in fact as old as the hills, so much the better. But the great dramatist has something better to do than to amuse either himself or his audience. He has to interpret life.*

~ George Bernard Shaw

## Well-Made Play

The well-made play is a genre of theatre from the 19th century, codified by Eugène Scribe, it was further developed by Émile Zola, who argued that plays could construct accurate models of life, for the purpose of analysing the 'cause and effect' of human behavior. A well-made play has a strong neoclassical flavor, involving a very tight plot and a climax that takes place very close to the end of the story, with most of the story taking place before the action of the play; much of the information regarding such previous action would be revealed through thinly veiled exposition. Following that would be a series of causally related plot complications. One of the hallmarks of the well-made play is the use of letters or papers falling into unintended hands in order to bring about plot twists and climaxes. Following the recommendations found in Aristotle's Poetics, the letters must bring about an unexpected reversal of fortune, in which it is often revealed that someone is not who he/she pretends to be. The reversal will allow for a quick conclusion, and a return to order, at which point the curtain falls.



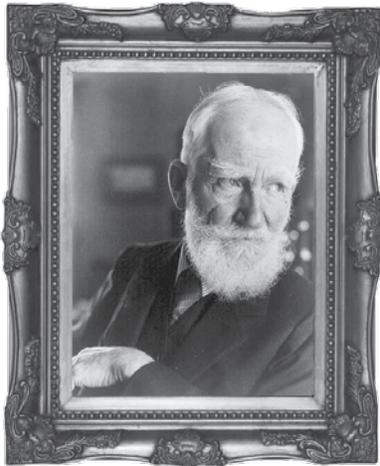
**OSCAR WILDE**  
1854 - 1900

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* exaggerates many of the conventions of the well-made play, such as the missing papers conceit (the hero, as an infant, was confused with the manuscript of a novel) and a final revelation (which, in this play, occurs about thirty seconds before the final curtain).



**HENRIK IBSEN**  
1828 - 1906

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* follows most of the conceits of the well-made play, but transcends the genre when, after incriminating papers are recovered, Nora (rather shockingly) rejects the expected return to normality. Several of Ibsen's subsequent plays seem to build on the general construction principles of the well-made play. *The Wild Duck* (1884) can be seen as a deliberate, meta-theatrical deconstruction of the Scribean formula. Ibsen sought a compromise between Naturalism and the well-made play which was fraught with difficulties since life does not fall easily into the syllogistic of either form.



**GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**  
1856 - 1950

Although George Bernard Shaw scorned the well-made play and claimed to create works which attempted to defy its conventions, he accepted them and even thrived by them for by necessity they concentrated his skills on the conversation between characters, his greatest asset as a dramatist. Other classic twists on the well-made play can be seen in his use of the General's coat and the hidden photograph in *Arms and the Man*.



**J.B. PRIESTLEY**  
1880 - 1956

Also, J.B. Priestley's 1946 *An Inspector Calls* may in some ways be considered a well-made play in that its action happens before the play starts, and in the case of the older Birlings no moral change takes place. The similarity between Priestley's play and this rather conservative genre might strike some readers/audiences as surprising because Priestley was a socialist. However, his play, like Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, transcends this genre by providing another plunge into chaos after the return to normality. He replaced the dramatic full stop with a question mark by revealing in the last scene that the 'inspector' who has exposed the complicity of a prosperous industrial family in the murder/suicide of a working-class girl, is not an inspector at all (perhaps a practical joker or a manifestation of the world to come), and the curtain falls on the news that a real girl has died and a real inspector is on the way.

## Well-Made Play (cont'd.)

Around the middle of the 19th century, European dramatists developed an interest in depicting contemporary life more truthfully and accurately, often with a direct or implied social message. This so-called social drama or drama of realism was pioneered in France by Émile Augier and by Alexandre Dumas fils (junior).



**ÉMILE ZOLA**  
1854 - 1900

By the beginning of the 1870s the realist drama introduced in the 1850s had begun to seem dated and somewhat artificial. A new generation of dramatists and theorists sought a drama that would even more closely represent the texture of everyday life. Realism gave way to naturalism, whose chief spokesman was French writer Émile Zola. In plays and theoretical essays, Zola called for a drama that would apply the methods of science to playwriting, observing and recording human behaviour as objectively and scrupulously as a scientist in a laboratory.

Simultaneously with Zola's writings, Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen began a series of plays that would mark the emergence of the modern theatre. Most of Ibsen's early works looked back to romanticism, his *Peer Gynt* (1867; translated 1892) for example, strongly suggesting Goethe's *Faust*. In the late 1870s, however, his work took a sharp turn with *A Doll's House* (1889) and *Ghosts* (1888). These plays resembled those of the naturalists in their willingness to deal with shocking material formerly thought unsuitable for the theatre—women's equality in *A Doll's House* and sexually transmitted disease in *Ghosts*. In form they owed much to Scribe and the well-made play, while in their general style and concern with social

problems they carried forward the concerns of the early realists. Ibsen's realistic works were read, produced (despite many problems with censors), and imitated throughout Europe, and in their wake a major new generation of dramatists emerged.

In Sweden, August Strindberg established his reputation with the realistic drama *Miss Julie* (1888).

In England a new school of serious social drama appeared, inspired in large part by Ibsen. The leaders of this group included Henry Arthur Jones, with such plays as *The Liars* (1897), and Arthur Wing Pinero, whose *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) portrays a woman who is unable to escape her tarnished past. George Bernard Shaw also began his playwriting career much under Ibsen's influence, with *Widowers' Houses* (1892), a play that attacked capitalism. Shaw considered Eugène Brieux of France the greatest playwright in Europe after Ibsen; and Brieux's rather shocking studies of social problems certainly suggest Ibsen.



**ANTON CHEKHOV**  
1860 - 1904

Another major contribution to naturalism was Anton Chekhov. Chekhov's delicate studies of life in provincial Russia, such as *The Sea Gull* (1912), owed something to the tradition of realism developed in Russia by Ostrovsky and Turgenev, though they created a tone unique to their author.

Although realism remained a dominant style through most of the 20th century, individual authors and movements regularly arose to challenge it. A number of authors near the end of the 19th century sought to return to the poetic language and visual spectacle of the romantic theatre, but only Edmond Rostand gained lasting success, with *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897; translated 1898). A much more important challenge to realism was mounted by symbolism, which developed in response to the objectivity and scientific rationality that naturalism had encouraged. Symbolists, by contrast, proclaimed that the imagination was the true interpreter of reality. Ibsen began to turn in a more symbolic, even mystic direction in his later plays, beginning with *The Master Builder* (1893).

Oscar Wilde provided a rare example of an English play influenced by symbolism in his *Salomé* (1893), but he is much better known for reviving the wit and style of the traditional English comedy of manners, most notably in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

British theatre of the early 20th century was dominated by Shaw. By infusing discussions of social problems with wit and paradox, Shaw lent power and success to the 19th-century tradition of realistic drama. A prime example is the treatment of war, peace, and weaponry in *Major Barbara* (1905). The treatment of social problems by John Galsworthy, such as labor unrest in *Strife* (1909), produced more typical realistic dramas. During the 1920s Somerset Maugham and Noël Coward revived once again the sophisticated comedy of manners, a long-time British specialty. Coward's *Private Lives* (1930) has been restaged frequently.



**NOËL COWARD**  
1899 - 1973

A series of strong reactions to the prevalent theater of realism appeared throughout the early 20th century in a number of continental European countries. Probably the most influential of the non-realistic dramatists from the early years of the 20th century was Strindberg, who around 1900 turned from naturalistic drama to more subjective works that sought to capture the inner imagination of dreams. He even titled one of them *The Dream Play* (1912). These plays, along with the dark, grotesque, and often shocking later dramas of Frank Wedekind of Germany, prepared the way for perhaps the most important reaction against realism in the early 20th century: expressionism.

After symbolism, the next movement to emerge was called futurism. Futurism rejected both realism and romanticism as relics of the 19th century and sought a new form for a new century, a form more suited to an age of technology.

Two much-publicized revolts against realism arose during World War I (1914-1918): dada and surrealism. Dada went further than futurism in its efforts to subvert existing art, including drama, and left only plays designed to be impossible to stage, among them *The Gas Heart* (1964) by French writer Tristan Tzara. Surrealism took a more positive approach, attempting to go beyond realism, as its name suggests, into the psychic world of dreams and imagination. Not surprisingly, neither of these rather extreme movements produced much drama. However, Jean Cocteau of France, who began his career as a surrealist, continued to employ its techniques in the 1930s in his popular adaptations of classical myths, including *Orpheus* (1933). Later the theatre of the absurd would show the influence of these movements.



**BERTOLT BRECHT**  
1898 - 1956

Expressionism emerged in Germany just before World War I and remained a major movement in the German theatre until the mid-1920s. Complaining that realist drama was concerned only with surface reality, the expressionists attempted to capture inner feelings as well, often distorting external reality to reflect the consciousness of the central character. In an effort to escape the specificity of realism in search of more general truths, expressionist characters were often presented as types—the Father, the Worker, or the Wife, for example.

Bertolt Brecht, the most influential German dramatist of the 20th century, began his career at the height of expressionism. Although he retained certain features of expressionist drama, including its episodic structure and social concerns, he turned away from its subjectivism and created a new kind of drama, which he called epic. This drama sought through theatrical means to diminish the audience's emotional involvement and encourage rational responses to the material presented.

## Well-Made Play (cont'd.)

A substantial playwriting tradition existed in the United States throughout the 19th century but attracted little international attention. Following World War I, however, American dramatists began to receive recognition, led by Eugene O'Neill, the outstanding figure of the early 20th century. Very much aware of European experiments in drama, O'Neill utilized a wide variety of dramatic styles, including symbolism in *The Fountain* (1925), expressionism in *The Hairy Ape* (1922), and realism in *Desire Under the Elms* (1924). Elements of expressionism, combined with a complex mixture of realism and theatricality, marked the most popular of all American experimental dramas, *Our Town* (1938), a hymn to the human experience by Thornton Wilder.



**TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**  
1911 - 1983

In the years immediately following World War II, the philosophy of existentialism gained many followers in France and elsewhere. Existentialism argued that the universe contained no fixed and unchanging set of moral codes, and that each individual must create his or her own order and morality.

The first great success of the absurdist movement and probably the most known of all its plays, *Waiting for Godot* (1954), was written in French by Irish-born playwright Samuel Beckett, who came to be recognized as one of the major dramatists of the late 20th century.

After World War II, the British stage was reinvigorated primarily by a new wave of realism, more concerned with social commentary and depicting the lives of the lower classes. The writers in this movement were initially called the “angry young men,” in reference to the disillusioned protagonist of the first important success in the new style, *Look Back in Anger* (1956) by John Osborne.



**EUGENE O'NEILL**  
1888 - 1953

In the United States, Anderson, Hellman, Odets, and Wilder continued to produce important works following World War II, but the most praised older dramatist was O'Neill. His later works, most notably *Long Day's Journey into Night* (produced 1956), were brought to the stage at last in the late 1950s. But the dominant dramatists of the postwar years were Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Miller pursued the Ibsenian tradition of social drama in his most famous play, *The Death of a Salesman* (1949), and enriched it with some touches of expressionism and symbolism by conveying parts of the story through the main character's memories. Williams also worked generally in the mode of realism, but in a somewhat more poetic style and stressing individual psychology more than social concerns, as can be seen in his first two major works, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). William Inge in such works as *Picnic* (1953) and Robert Anderson in *Tea and Sympathy* (1953) echoed the themes and approach of Williams and Miller.

## Theater of Today

Late Modern theater often experiments with realism; however a great deal of experimental theater rejects the conventions of realism and earlier forms (e.g., epic theater, absurdist theater, and postmodern theater). Key figures of the 20th and 21st centuries include: Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Konstantin Stanislavski, Harold Pinter, Eugene O'Neill, Samuel Beckett, Dario Fo, and Tony Kushner.

# WARM-UP ACTIVITY #1

## “Yes. . .And” Improvisation

### Teacher Tip

To help establish an open, ‘can-do’ mindset that supports the creative process of playwriting, start with the following improvisation activity.

An essential rule of improvisational theater is to never deny your fellow actor. Instead, be willing and able to accept all the ideas a character communicates - then, contribute or add to the scene. This improv principle is known as “Yes...And”

### In groups of 4-6

**Step 1:** At the beginning of the scene, Character #1 will begin by establishing a setting and a plot.

Example

Character #1: What a hot and miserable day to be riding the subway!

**Step 2:** Following the “Yes...And” method, Characters 2, 3, and 4 will (in turn) accept the premise and add onto the situation.

Example

Character #2: Yes and to top it off, the trains this morning are running really slow.

Character #3: Yes and I’m already late for work as it is.

Character #4: Yes and it makes me think I should stop relying on the subway and just walk to work during the summer months.

### Extension

The scene could continue on indefinitely with the actors simply agreeing with one another; however, a situation that incorporates conflict is more interesting. For example, even though the characters affirm each response with “yes...and,” each character can also argue:

Example

Character #2: Yes and it makes me think I should stop relying on the subway and just walk to work during the summer months.

Character #3: Yes and you’d be complaining about the heat and lack of time just as much walking - believe me!

Character #4: Yeah and I suppose you have a better solution!?

Character #3: Yeah...sure. After I finish up with this workweek, I’m going to start up my own business and work from home. That way, I won’t have to deal with the lousy subway system or walking out in the heat and humidity each day. I’ll just stay home in my comfortable, cool home office and be my own boss!

### Teacher Tip

As a scene develops, characters will naturally want to speak/respond out of turn. Notice in the above example that Character #3 speaks before and after Character #4’s line.

Working on “Yes...And” exercises, help actors and playwrights learn how to create scenes in which they accept and support the ideas offered by participating players. You don’t actually need to say the words “yes...and” for the system to work. Simply accept what the character is saying and allow it to build the present scene. Note: If you deny your fellow performer, you stop the free flowing exchange of ideas and the scene becomes dead in the water before it has the chance to develop.

# WARM-UP ACTIVITY #2A

## Key Terms used in Playwriting

### In groups of 5

- Summarize a short story by verbally acting out or by creating frozen pictures (tableaux) of a well-known myth, folktale, poem or song.
- For every story told, each group should clearly communicate a beginning, middle, and end. For example, when using tableaux, groups should present three still pictures that represent the tale's beginning (tableau 1), middle (tableau 2), and end (tableau 3).

### As a class

At the end of each group's presentation, guess what the story is about, and where it might be from.

Discuss how the following terms apply to the story's actions and plot:

1. Protagonist: the main character in the play that drives the central plot of the story  
Who is the protagonist in the story?
2. Antagonist: the adversary of the play's hero (protagonist) who initiates conflict by presenting obstacles, which aims to stop the protagonist  
Who is the antagonist in the story?
3. Motivation: the strong desire that compels the protagonist to achieve his/her goal  
What is the main motivation of the story?
4. Objective: the protagonist's central goal of a play or other literary work  
What is the essential objective of the story or the protagonist?
5. Conflict: the main obstacle that stalls the protagonist from reaching his/her goal  
What key conflict is present in the story?
6. Obstacles: secondary conflicts that the protagonist faces which lead to the play's main conflict  
What obstacles get in the way of the protagonist?
7. Resolution: the conclusion of the play, which is presented soon after the protagonist chooses to obtain or surrender the objective (also known as the climax)  
How does the story find resolution?

## WARM-UP ACTIVITY #2B

### Solidifying Key Terms of Playwriting

#### In groups of 2

Based on the terms from the previous activity, match the playwriting term in the left column with the correct definition in the right column. Write the correct number on the line next to the matching definition.

#### TERM

1. Drama
2. Resolution
3. Conflict
4. Motivation
5. Dramatic Structure
6. Structural Statement
7. Antagonist
8. Obstacles
9. Protagonist
- 10 Main Objective

#### DEFINITION

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. The beginning, middle and end of a play
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Conclusion of the play that begins directly after the protagonist makes a choice to obtain or relinquish the objective (after the climax)
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. The key summary points on the who and the what in a play
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. The main character that drives the play
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. Need or desire that drives the protagonist to reach his/her goal
- \_\_\_\_\_ f. The protagonist's central goal
- \_\_\_\_\_ g. Action and dialogue within a play
- \_\_\_\_\_ h. Small resistances that create tension and acts as the central barrier inhibiting protagonist from obtaining his/her goal
- \_\_\_\_\_ i. Main aim is to stop the protagonist
- \_\_\_\_\_ j. Secondary conflicts placed in the path of the protagonist which feeds into the larger conflict

#### Teacher Tip

Answer key to the above table on Solidifying Key Terms in Playwriting

1:g; 2:b; 3:h; 4:e; 5:a; 6:c; 7:i; 8;j; 9:d; 10:f

# MAIN ACTIVITY

## “A” and “B” Playwriting

### In groups of 2

This activity helps actors and playwrights learn how to establish character, objective, obstacle, and setting – all the elements that need to be developed for moving the action of a play forward. These scenes can take place anywhere by anyone with whatever obstacle you (as writer, audience, or actor) decide.

### part i

- Teacher asks for a student volunteer to stand in front of the class and join him/her in reading the scene example below.
- As a group, students answer applicable questions about characters, obstacles, objectives and setting.

Scene example

A: It's you.

B: Didn't you expect me?

A: Not really.

B: Well, I'm here.

A: Are you going to stay this time?

B: Of course - you?

A: You bet.

B: Let's go.

A: Now?

B: Right now!

- Two more student volunteers stand and read the same scene but this time, they read/interpret the scene applying a different set of circumstances (e.g., setting, objectives, obstacles, etc.).
- After hearing the second version, students answer the same applicable questions and note the different interpretation of dialogue and development of characters (e.g., characters' tone/manner).  
How different was the interpretation of each reading? What were the contrasting aspects of the two versions?  
How would the use of a specific prop, tone or pace affect the interpretation of these scenes?

### Teacher Tip

The dialogue in the short scene above is very economical and the meaning of the lines rely heavily on how the actors answer the questions on who the characters are; what they want; and what is preventing them from getting what they want. As students begin to write their own dialogue, ask them to model it after conversations they've heard. This will help create dialogue that sounds natural and reveal the personalities of their characters.

### Extension

Write a few more lines at the end of these scenes.

How do the additional lines of dialogue affect the characters and their circumstances?

## part ii

- Students divide into pairs. Students choose who will be actor “A” and one will be actor “B”.
- Give each pair a piece of paper and two pens/pencils.
- Each student will write his/her letter designation alternately in the left hand margin (i.e., A: B: etc.).
- Assign each pair a first line of dialogue, which student “A” will write at the top of the page. The first line should open up the scene to a variety of possibilities; it should be an “inciting” line (i.e., any line that implies a conflict between the two characters). Examples of inciting first lines are:  
Where have you been?  
Where are you going with that?  
She’s not who she says she is...  
Stop, thief!  
Just who do you think you are?  
Don’t lie to me.  
Is that really you?
- Actor “B” then responds on paper to the opening line. Students continue writing alternating lines of dialogue, one line at a time.
- Have volunteers read out their scenes and, as a class, discuss the interesting elements that drew the audience into the action of the scene.

## Teacher Tip

This writing exercise should be done silently. Be sure to keep the students’ flow of writing constant; have them write down whatever comes to mind. Students should not worry about the content of the script; just allow the scene to evolve. The resulting dialogue will have spontaneity and dramatic reality that planned writing does not have.

When explaining this exercise, ask students to refrain from name-calling, one-word answers, and contrariness. The students are working together to craft a scene; they are not in competition with each other.

## Extension

Instead of one line each, “A” writes an impassioned letter to “B” asking for something he/she desperately needs. “B” writes a letter back, denying it. “A” responds, “B” answers until “A” has made such a strong case that “B” agrees.

## Teacher Tip

This exercise usually produces very good dramatic writing because the stakes are high and the speeches are longer than one or two sentences. It’s also a good way to make the point that on stage, every single word counts.

# REFLECTION AND REVIEW

As a homework assignment, write your own dramatic monologue.

- Through first-person narrative, you will write in-role.
- The character can be anyone you want (e.g., yourself; one of the characters from the previous scenes created; or by imagining a new character).
- The character will enter a room and make a discovery within the room. The narrative of the monologue should involve the character telling someone (it could be another person or the audience) about his/her experience. Regardless of what the character discovers in the room, it should change him/her significantly so that they leave the room a different person.

When writing your monologue, remember to:

- ✓ Use the voice of the character only;
- ✓ Decide whom the character is talking to (him/herself, another person, the audience);
- ✓ Decide when the scene takes place;
- ✓ Decide where the scene takes place;
- ✓ Identify the reason or need to tell something at this moment;
- ✓ Decide on whether the character has a secret and whether or not he/she will reveal the secret or keep it hidden.

# LESSON #2

## Building a Character

In this lesson, students explore building a character using source material. They explore the characters using a variety of improvisational strategies and tableaux. Students then create monologues that express the emotions of the characters they create.

In these activities, students will:

- **Demonstrate an understanding of the play and its dramatic structures**
- **Demonstrate an understanding of techniques used to interpret and re-create roles**
- **Demonstrate an understanding of how role is communicated through language, gesture, costume, props, and symbols**
- **Demonstrate an understanding of methods used by playwrights and actors to develop characters and deepen roles for actors**
- **Interpret and present a dramatic text, using only voice or movement techniques**
- **Identify and use effective styles of collaboration in drama**
- **Create an original monologue based on interpretation and improvisational drama exercises**

### Required materials/resources:

Copies of artwork listed below or access to computers with online capabilities so that students can view the artwork:

1. *Las Meninas*, 1656 by Diego Velazquez  
<http://mediastudiesendicott.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/velazquez-las-meninas.jpg>
2. *Nighthawks*, 1942 by Edward Hopper  
<http://nsm.uh.edu/~dgraur/Images/hopper.nighthawks.jpg>
3. *Tar Beach*, 1988 by Faith Ringgold  
[http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist\\_art\\_base/archive/images/216.1493.jpg](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/archive/images/216.1493.jpg)
4. *Another Place, Another Time* - a drawing by Harris Burdick  
[http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/davidc/6c\\_files/documents/mysteries/Harris%20Burdick/placetime.htm](http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/davidc/6c_files/documents/mysteries/Harris%20Burdick/placetime.htm)

Writing paper, pens/pencils

### Required materials/resources:

Open, cleared space for students to explore the process of script writing through the techniques of movement, acting, and creative writing exercises

## Instructional Insight

### The Play and its Dramatic Structure

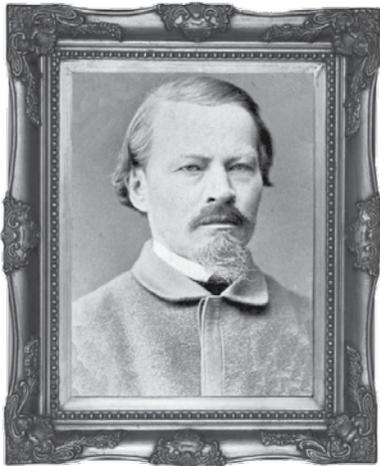
A play tells a story through dialogue and action that use specific structures and devices. A central conflict usually drives the story. Groups of dialogue or episodes are called scenes. Scenes are used to show when time or place change. Large shifts in time or place are marked by acts, which are usually composed of several scenes.

A short play is called the One-Act. Due to its limited length, the one-act play typically includes less complex plots. Like a short story, it contains only the most essential elements. It tells the story, illustrates its characters, presents its theme and ends rather quickly. Using this format, it is important that short plays adopt a clear, straightforward, and engaging story.

### Classic Five Act Dramatic Structure

Dramatic structure refers to the plot structure of a play and other dramatic works. A drama can be divided into three basic parts: a beginning, middle, and an end. German dramatist and novelist, Gustav Freytag is well known for his extensive analysis of the ancient Greek and Shakespearean drama. According to Freytag, a drama can be divided into five parts, or acts:

1. exposition;
2. rising action;
3. climax, or turning point;
4. falling action; and
5. denouement or catastrophe (i.e., the resolution).



**GUSTAV FREYTAG**  
1816 - 1895

1. **EXPOSITION** is the play's background information, which is needed to understand the plot provided. This piece of information involves the protagonist, the antagonist, the setting, and the main conflict. It ends with the inciting feature, which is an event in the action of the story without which there would be no story. The exposition ends with the inciting moment, which is the episode (e.g., confrontation) that sets the remainder of the story in motion and begins with the second act (i.e., the rising action).
2. **RISING ACTION**, the basic internal conflict is complicated by the arrival of the related secondary conflicts, which includes various obstacles that aggravate the attempt of the protagonist to reach his/her goal. Secondary conflicts can involve adversaries of lesser importance than the main antagonist, who may or may not work with and/or support the actions of the story's main antagonist.
3. **CLIMAX**, or turning point, is included in the third act, which marks a change, either for the better or for the worse, in the affairs of the protagonist. If the play is a comedy, circumstances for the lead character, up to this point, will have been poor. After the turning point, however, things become better for the protagonist. In a tragedy, the opposite is the case where circumstances for the protagonist will go from bad to worse.
4. **FALLING ACTION** is the moment of reversal after the climax. As conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist come to a head, there is either victory or defeat for the protagonist against the antagonist. The falling action might also contain a final moment of suspense, providing a twist with which the closing outcome of the conflict is in doubt.
5. **DENOUEMENT** ends a comedy, where the protagonist, or main character, is well off at the end of the story. **CATASTROPHE** ends a tragedy, where the protagonist is the protagonist is totally devastated, or, is often dead.

The use of dramatic structure is very important to a play's success. A summary of the five act dramatic structure and a short list of elements used for today's successful modern play include:

- i) Plot - the series of events that give a story its meaning.
- ii) Initiating Action - the event that triggers the other events of the play, the main conflict, tension, predicament, or challenge that fuels a story's plot.
- iii) Rising Action - a series of events that heightens the conflict between the protagonist force and antagonist force.
- iv) Turning Point - the most dramatic scene where either the protagonist or antagonist gains advantage.
- v) Falling Action - series of events in the plot after the turning point but before the climax. These events are the results of the rising action.
- vi) Climax - the peak of the play, resolves the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist forces, as one of them wins.
- vii) Conclusion - plot is completed and the loose ends are tied up.
- viii) Theme - the main idea that the plot develops from; it gives the purpose to the action.
- ix) Style - the way the piece is written is called the style (e.g., sparse, descriptive, humorous or sarcastic).
- x) Setting - where and when the play occurs.
- xi) Characters - the people that power the plot of a play.

## The Four Key Elements of a Play

Writers should aim at mastering the above elements before they get too far into the creative writing process. If they don't, the story might end up being aimless and episodic. With this in mind, let's expand on four key ELEMENTS OF A PLAY.

### I. Character

Characters are roles that people play in a drama. As a play progresses, a character's motivation and objectives are exposed through his/her actions, which reveals what he/she does and why. A character's motivation or objective is driven by what he/she wants. Clues about characters can be drawn from what a character says and what others say about him/her.

- i) Make sure to introduce the main character (protagonist) soon after the play starts. It is essential to distinguish a focal character or hero even if there are two main characters, there is always one who is more important to the story, or whose journey is slightly more important or urgent than the other.
- ii) Introduce the story's opponent (antagonist). This could be a villain, a natural disaster, a group or anything actively working against the protagonist. A good antagonist is usually better defined as opposed to something vague (e.g., a natural disaster or a villain). Choose a specific, defined opponent to counter the actions of the hero.

When developing a character, the writer should ask the following questions:

- What is unique about each character? How do we distinguish one character from another?
- How might we identify the protagonist? How do we know who the antagonist is?
- What do the protagonist and antagonist need or want? What obstacle(s) prevent a character from achieving his/her desires?
- Identify what and/or why the protagonist and antagonist are in conflict with one another?
- What motivates a character into action? How does the character's dialogue reveal who he or she is? How does the dialogue further the action of the play?

## The Four Key Elements of a Play *(cont'd.)*

### 2. Exposition

Exposition is dialogue or description that gives the audience the background of the characters and the present situation; it provides information that helps the audience gather answers to the following questions:

When developing a character, the writer should ask the following questions:

- Where are we (e.g., time, place, and atmosphere)?
- What are the dynamics of the current situation?
- What are the relationships between the cast of characters? How do they relate with one another?
- What are these characters doing in the present setting/story?

It's important to give the audience only the pertinent information at the time when they need to know it. Always provide valid reasons for why characters expose revealing information to the audience. Such revealing needs to serve a purpose (e.g., use past information to push forward the present action). Important characters often reveal exposition as a way to coerce another character to do something.

### 3. Dialogue

Dialogue serves the key purpose of providing the exposition so we understand the beginning of the play's action as well as highlighting important knowledge about the characters, which helps further the action of the play.

It's important to remember to choose words carefully; be economic and mindful of selecting words that have purpose; that assist in moving the action forward; do not include dialogue that is gratuitous or extraneous. Good dialogue ignites and motivates characters to engage because of another character's action.

To avoid unmotivated dialogue, make sure to answer the following questions:

- Who (exactly) are these particular characters within the story?
- What are their motivations or objectives? What do they want?
- What obstacles prevent them from getting what they want?

### 4. Structure

#### i. The Play's Beginning

The world at the beginning of a play is in some state of balance; however, this does not mean that the world of the play is lackluster with nothing interesting going on. Instead, the beginning holds a certain kind of stability, equilibrium or status quo. What makes a play catapult from this state of balance is an intrusion (also known as a point of attack or an initial incident). There should be an element of trouble or danger that the character is working in. If there isn't any trouble, then there isn't anything forcing the hero to act. Trouble or conflict is what prompts characters into action. A play's dramatic structure is dependent on this initial incident; this disruption of the balance. The goal of a play is for characters to reestablish another balance. This goal is what drives the action.

Think back on a dramatic work you've seen, and answer the following questions:

- What is the balance in the beginning of the play?
- What intrusion changes that balance?
- What pushes the play from the initial incident or intrusion to the end of the play where the plot comes back to a balanced state?

## ii. Emotional Stakes

Three important aspects of a play that ensures it moves forward and develops successfully are: conflict, Conflict, CONFLICT! Conflict provides the static energy in a play; it fuels the storyline and is driven by opposing desires. When a character's desire (i.e., want) meets an obstacle, conflict is created. Before you can establish a conflict, you must first know what your character(s) want. In other words, want + obstacle (and the overcoming/not overcoming of that obstacle) = conflict. By defining a character's want, the writer establishes what the character's purpose is (i.e., what he/she is working toward throughout his/her journey).

Each play can contain one or all of the following types of dramatic conflict:

- Man against himself
- Man against other individuals
- Man against society
- Man against fate or the universe or natural forces

In all cases of conflict the battle is always between what one wants (motivation) and what stands in his/her way (obstacle) Be mindful that dialogue that doesn't clearly illustrate what a character wants will present weak, unclear, and uninteresting. Characters speak or act because they have been moved by another force to do so because they want something.

## iii. Climax

Before a story is written, or soon after beginning to write a new story, it's best to know what the climax will be. This enables the writer to systematically build toward the climax and provides a focus point for the story.

A play's climax occurs when all the major forces of the story converge into a final battle. A climax is the moment when obstacles are so intense, that there is nowhere left to go but one way. This one way out affects one or more of the central characters, leaving their lives altered in a meaningful way. The aftermath of this definitive conflict restores the play's balance. Following the climax, the intensity quickly subsides as that balance is restored.

## iv. Resolution

The resolution occurs at the end of the play, leaving the audience with a final image, message, and/or feeling. It can be communicated in a variety of ways such as a lengthy monologue, a few short lines of dialogue, or through a simple physical action. A resolution does not require all aspects of the play to be resolved, in fact, it is best to not do so. Remember that the play simply returns to a balance, not necessarily utopia. Some of the most well loved plays in history don't offer a completely perfect ending for each character and situation. Often times, a good play leaves the audience pondering on some unanswered questions.

## v. Theme

A play's theme develops from various components of the play such as its action, characters, and image. In some cases, theme isn't evident until you reach the end of the play. A play's topics or theme(s) is a result of action, character, and image.

# WARM-UP ACTIVITY #1

## The Story Wheel

### As a class

- Create a story wheel. (Note: This activity requires a large open space.)
- Everyone lies on their backs and make a wheel formation with their heads towards the center.
- The idea is to start with a well-known story/fable and adapt it. Start with the story's original beginning, change the middle, and create a new ending. For example, tell a story from another character's perspective - a perspective we have not heard before.
- Choose someone to begin a story with one line of dialogue.
- The person next to the person, who starts, adds to the story. Each person, in turn, adds a line.
- Story ends once everyone in the circle has contributed a line or word.
- Create another story wheel but this time, create your own original story!

# MAIN ACTIVITY #1

## Setting the Scene

### In groups of 3 to 5

- Each group chooses one of the images from the following list:
  1. *Las Meninas*, 1656 by Diego Velazquez  
<http://mediastudiesendicott.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/velazquez-las-meninas.jpg>
  2. *Nighthawks*, 1942 by Edward Hopper  
<http://nsm.uh.edu/~dgraur/Images/hopper.nighthawks.jpg>
  3. *Tar Beach*, 1988 by Faith Ringgold  
[http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist\\_art\\_base/archive/images/216.1493.jpg](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/archive/images/216.1493.jpg)
  4. *Another Place, Another Time* - a drawing by Harris Burdick  
[http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/davidc/6c\\_files/documents/mysteries/Harris%20Burdick/placetime.htm](http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/davidc/6c_files/documents/mysteries/Harris%20Burdick/placetime.htm)
  5. A photo from a magazine or newspaper.
- Examine the chosen image closely and brainstorm (as a group) about the details of the picture (e.g., characters' expressions, ages, and interpersonal dynamics; the location of the scene). Answer the following questions to help facilitate your group's discussions about each figure in the painting or photograph:
  - Who is this person?
  - What is he/she doing?
  - What is he/she thinking?
  - How is he/she feeling?
  - What is happening at this very moment?
  - What is unique about this person?
- Record the group's ideas on the back of the image or on a separate piece of paper.
- Discuss what may have happened immediately before and immediately after the time shown in the painting/photo.
- Beginning with a tableaux recreation of the painting, assume one of the characters in the painting or photo. In a frozen position, and in-role as the assumed character, each member of your group speaks a line of dialogue that represents his/her character at the time the image was captured.
- Next, each character will (based on your group's previous discussion) add a new position or movement with a new line of dialogue that depicts the scene before the painting/photo was created.

- Finally, each character adds a new position or movement with a new line of dialogue that depicts the scene that might have occurred after the image was captured.
- Practice improvising the three scenes.
- Share the created beginning, middle and end scenes with the whole class.

## MAIN ACTIVITY #2

### Writing-in-Role

#### On your own

- Select a character from a painting or magazine you're interested in exploring OR continue developing the character created in the previous lesson's dramatic monologue.

#### Teacher Tip

It is not necessary for students to select characters of the same gender as themselves.

- Complete the Character Biography Worksheet on the following page. This information focuses on gathering your character's given circumstances; background information; relationships between characters; and personal secrets, which will help develop creative writing ideas.
- In a series of timed writing exercises, write in-role as the character you've chosen. Each exercise will have a 2-minute writing time, in which everyone must write non-stop on the following topics:
  1. Write about your relationship with the person next to you in the image or within your existing monologue.
  2. Write about a toy or a game from your childhood.
  3. Write about where you would travel if you could go anywhere in the world.

# MAIN ACTIVITY #3

## Developing Characters through Hot Seating

### In groups of 12

- In order to create a truly believable character, it is useful to give your chosen character a secret. It can be big or small. Choose to either reveal the secret or not. If you don't reveal the secret, just knowing about it privately will help to deepen your role.
- One at a time, take turns developing your character through "Hot Seating." Everyone in your group will ask questions of someone in the "Hot Seat" who will be in-role as his/her character with a secret. This will allow the group to brainstorm information about their character and enhance characterization.

## REFLECTION AND REVIEW

### Teacher Tip

At the end of this lesson pose the following questions to the class:

- What skills are you developing as you improvise in drama?
- Do you agree with the statement: "Improvising is more about listening than speaking"?
- Which did you prefer: to tell a story through improvisation or monologue? Why?

# CHARACTER BIOGRAPHY WORKSHEET

## GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES

Name of Character \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Height: \_\_\_\_\_ Weight: \_\_\_\_\_

Eye color: \_\_\_\_\_ Hair color: \_\_\_\_\_ Skin color/tone: \_\_\_\_\_

Distinguishing characteristics (physical or personality)

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Family:

Occupation:

Education:

Socio-economic status:

Politics and/or religion:

Secrets: (Include at least three shameful secrets that no one else knows about the character.)

Notable past Influences: (Include five pivotal experiences and three key people in the character's life. Explain why these events and people are important. What effect did they have on the character's personality)?

# LESSON #3

## Exploring the Structure of a Play

### Instructional Insight

When writing a play, the playwright uses a playwriting format that follows the guidelines below:

- Character's name is placed in the center of the page
- Stage directions is set at the left of the page and in italics
- Stage directions in the middle of a line is encased in parentheses and in italics
- Dialogue begins to the left of the page in print
- Double space between the last line of dialogue and the next character name
- For additional information on how to format a stage play, visit: <http://www.scriptfrenzy.org/eng/howtoformatastageplay>. This website provides details on how to format: stage directions, dialogue, line spacing, acts, scenes, characters, setting, and synopses.

Example:

### ACT I

#### Scene One

(At the beginning of the play or act, stage directions can be placed halfway over to the right side of the page. This gives the reader basic information about where and when the scene is set, and what the currently happening on stage as the scene begins.)

Mrs. Birken

*Mrs. Birken enters from Stage Right*

Have you seen my car keys? I need to get to the grocery store before it closes. (*Michael doesn't respond*) Michael! I am talking to you!

Michael

What?

Mrs. Birken

Have you seen my car keys

Michael

Nope.

# WARM-UP ACTIVITY

## “What if. . .” - Creative Writing Exercise

### In groups of 2

- Many myths and fairytales center on the premise of an evil spell being created by an antagonist, which is then broken through the tenacity, cleverness, and pure virtue of the protagonist.
- Research and find three myths or fairytales that work with this premise. For example, in the fairytale, *Sleeping Beauty*, a curse is cast on a princess to fall into a deep sleep when she touches a spinning wheel’s spindle before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday. The spell is broken only by true love’s kiss, which comes in the form of a handsome prince.
- Select two existing myths or fairytales and create alternate versions to the original. These alternative versions do not necessarily have to end on a happy note.
- For each story, create a new title, and two “What if...” questions that connect to the tale but require the tale, as we know it, to change in various ways. For example: What if the prince kisses the sleeping princess and she turns to stone?

Myth/Fairytale #1

Original title: \_\_\_\_\_ New title: \_\_\_\_\_

Version 1 - What if...

Version 2 - What if...

Myth/Fairytale #2

Original title: \_\_\_\_\_ New title: \_\_\_\_\_

Version 1 - What if...

Version 2 - What if...

Myth/Fairytale #3

Original title: \_\_\_\_\_ New title: \_\_\_\_\_

Version 1 - What if...

Version 2 - What if...

- After the two questions are written for each myth or fairytale, write a short scene for the story’s two principle characters using one of the ‘what if’ scenarios.

# MAIN ACTIVITY

## Writing a One-Act Play

### On your own or with a partner:

- Every story/play, including the one-act play, is comprised of three parts.
  - Part 1 includes:  
The setup; establishing the conflict; introducing the characters, symbols, themes, and setting
  - Part 2 includes:  
The complication; the rising action; the turning point (usually occurs in the middle); and the character development
  - Part 3 includes:  
The resolution; the outcomes after the turning point; the climax (which occurs close to the end); and resolving the conflict
- In partners, instruct students to choose a play topic from:  
[http://www.thewritesource.com/writing\\_topics/#inc](http://www.thewritesource.com/writing_topics/#inc)
- From your selected topic, begin writing a 10-minute, one-act play for 2-5 characters that is approximately 10-15 pages in length. Use the following steps to help guide and structure your writing.
  - Decide what your play will be about;
  - Clearly outline the play's action for parts 1, 2, and 3
  - Write short character descriptions (Option: Use the Character Biography Worksheet on p. 20)
  - Think of a creative, clever, and unique way to end the play.

## REFLECTION AND REVIEW

Once you've established the plotline for your one-act play, create a structural statement that summarizes your story in two sentences. This is good exercise and way to for writers to be succinct and targeted in their story elements.

*(Protagonist)* is in *(Situation)* and must accomplish *(External Goal)*.  
But can *(Protagonist)* defeat *(Antagonist)* when *(Climax happens)*?

The first sentence defines the story premise.

The closed (yes-no) question simplifies the story for the writer and reader toward the story's emotional core.

## Playwriting: Top Ten Tips

1. Your play needs a conflict: is there a compelling problem?
2. There must be growth in your characters over the course of the play. What have they learned, how have they changed, how has the plot affected them?
3. Character speech should be interesting. Make sure each character has a distinct voice - you should be able to “hear” each character.
4. Your characters all need interesting actions: plays are about action, not just talking.
5. Every scene should build on the one that came before adding new information about the plot or characters.
6. Be original: don't do something you've already seen (on TV or in the movies).
7. Give yourself enough time to write the play.
8. Never use a stage direction when you should have a scene - your story needs to be told through the events and actions of the scenes.
9. If the reader/audience can see it, don't say it.
10. Keep ahead of the reader. Don't let them figure out your ending before you get there.

# LESSON #4

## Creating your own One-Act Play

In this final lesson, students have opportunities to further develop their one-act play through additional drama-based exploration and playwriting strategies.

In these activities, students will:

- **demonstrate an understanding of the foundations of playwriting**
- **apply the classic five act dramatic structure to their playwriting**
- **identify, sort, and order main ideas and supporting details for writing tasks, using a variety of strategies**
- **evaluate, assess, and critique their work and that of their peers in a productive and respectful way.**
- **revise, refine, and further develop the writing and performing on their original one-act plays.**

Required materials/resources:

Writing paper, pens/pencils

Classroom set-up:

Open, cleared space for students to explore the process of script writing through the techniques of movement, acting, and creative writing exercises

## Instructional Insight

### Guidelines for Playwriting in the Classroom

1. Create a foundation so the students have something to refer to when they are having difficulties. Review the Classic Five Act Dramatic Structure: Introduction; Development; Climax; Denouement; Resolution (p. 20).
2. Establish freedom of speech by creating an environment where the students are safe to express their voices but make it clear that the words they choose must be justified in the writing.
3. Create a safe environment where the students feel free to comment on each other's work in a constructive and respectful way.

## MAIN ACTIVITY

### Developing your own One-Act Play

**In groups of 3:**

- Based from last lesson's one-act play exercise, finish a draft version of your play.
- When writing the script, be mindful of using the playwriting format and adhere to the dramatic structures of playwriting (i.e., exposition; rising action; climax, or turning point; falling action; and resolution).
- Change any elements of the beginning, middle, and end you feel would make the story stronger (e.g., to be more dramatic or poignant; light or humorous).
- Exchange your draft version with someone in your group.
- Read out loud the draft version received by your fellow group member.

## Teacher Tip

Teacher should guide student groups to provide constructive comments and suggestions for each draft read.

- Based on the feedback given, edit your draft versions and work to complete a second draft.
- If time allows, choose 1-2 of your group's scripts to rehearse and present to the class.
- Class should provide feedback on the presentations.

## Variation *(when time permits)*

1. Give each team of six a Clue board game.
2. Review the instructions to the game.
3. Play the game and incorporate the following:
  - Background information for each character;
  - Relationships between characters;
  - Secrets for each character;
  - Reasons why these characters are at this location (e.g., a central multi-room location) and why each character had a reason to murder Mr. Body;
4. Write a 10-minute play (10-12 pages) using character information and ideas from the game.
5. When writing the script, be mindful of using the playwriting format and adhere to the dramatic structures of playwriting (i.e., exposition; rising action; climax, or turning point; falling action; and resolution).
6. After completing the play, title then cast and perform it for the class.

# REFLECTION AND REVIEW

As a class, discuss the following questions:

1. What did you find challenging when writing a one-act play?
2. Why is it important to include a problem/conflict in a play?
3. Why is it important to know what each character wants?
4. When writing a play, is it important to establish obstacles that prevent the characters from getting what they want? Why?
5. What are the positive/negative aspects of writing a one-act play?
6. What are the positive/negative aspects of performing a one-act play?

## Teacher Tip

*A short play, having a great advantage over a long one in that it can sustain a mood without technical creaking or over padding, deserves a better fate, and if by careful writing, acting, and producing I can do a little towards reinstating it in its rightful pride, I shall have achieved one of more sentimental ambitions.*

~ Noël Coward

# RESOURCE MATERIALS

## Books and Articles

- Ball, D. (1983). *Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Campbell, J., Moyers, B. (1991). *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Cassidy, M. (1992). *Playwriting; Step by Step*. 2nd Ed. California. Resource Publications.
- El Elsom, J. (1976). *Post-War British Theatre*. London: Routledge.
- McKee, R. (1997). *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- McLaughlin, B. (1997). *The Playwright's Process*. New York: Back Stage Books.
- Straczynski, M.J. (1996). *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting*. Writer's Digest Books.
- van Itallie, J. (1997). *The Playwright's Workbook*. New York: Applause Books.
- Vogler, C. (2007). *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Studio City: Michael Wise Productions.

## WEBSITES

**Playwriting opportunities for the e-merging writer**  
<http://www.playwritingopportunities.com/>

**Insight for playwrights**  
<http://www.insightforplaywrights.com/>

**Five basic story elements**  
[http://writingfiction.suite101.com/article.cfm/the\\_five\\_basic\\_story\\_elements#ixzz0YyE2GVCw](http://writingfiction.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_five_basic_story_elements#ixzz0YyE2GVCw)

**Elements of a play**  
<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/Virtualit/fiction/elements.asp?e=1>  
[http://www.saskschools.ca/curr\\_content/drama30/teacher/4playstructure.html](http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/drama30/teacher/4playstructure.html)

**Art and craft of playwriting**  
<http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/artweb/playwriting/seminar.html>

**Greek exercise**  
<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1983/2/83.02.03.x.html>

**Short writing exercises**  
<http://www.shortstorygroup.com/exercises.htm>

**Teen writing exercises**  
<http://teenwriting.about.com/library/exercises/blexercises.htm>

**15 craft exercises**  
<http://www.poewar.com/archives/2004/10/21/fifteen-craft-exercises-for-writers/>

**General writing exercises**  
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/WritingGroups/exercises.htm>

**Classroom activities**  
<http://pdc.avc.edu/Faculty/etrow/playex2.html>  
[www.dsbnc.edu.on.ca/SCHOOLS/EDEN/ENGLISH/MAIOLLO/EWC4UC](http://www.dsbnc.edu.on.ca/SCHOOLS/EDEN/ENGLISH/MAIOLLO/EWC4UC)  
<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/les.cfm>  
[http://ims.ode.state.oh.us/ODE/IMS/Lessons/Web\\_Content/CAT\\_LP\\_S01\\_BA\\_L10\\_I04\\_01.pdf](http://ims.ode.state.oh.us/ODE/IMS/Lessons/Web_Content/CAT_LP_S01_BA_L10_I04_01.pdf)  
[http://thehipp.org/programs/seniorplaywright/Playwriting\\_Study\\_Guide.pdf](http://thehipp.org/programs/seniorplaywright/Playwriting_Study_Guide.pdf)  
[http://www.shawfest.com/assets/guides/Shaw\\_Festival\\_Study\\_Guide\\_Brief\\_Encounters.pdf](http://www.shawfest.com/assets/guides/Shaw_Festival_Study_Guide_Brief_Encounters.pdf)

**The Dramatist Guild of America**  
<http://www.dramatistsguild.com/>

**The Internet Theatre Bookshop**  
<http://www.stageplays.com/writers.htm>

**Drama Workshop**  
<http://chdramaworkshop.homestead.com/Home.html>



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