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STAGE WRITE

An Introduction to Playwriting for Middle and High School Students

Author **DEBORAH SALZER** has a theatrical as well as an educational background. After earning her B.A. in English Literature from Oberlin College and a brief stint as an actor in New York City, she obtained her Masters (in Education) from the Bank Street College of Education. She is the founding director of the nonprofit organization Playwrights Project, which promotes literacy, creativity, and communication skills in young people through drama-based activities. Assisted by Fia Lefkowitz, a Teaching Artist on staff at Playwrights Project, she has written **STAGE WRITE**.

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STAGE WRITE

The nationwide movement for high standards has not only determined what students should learn, but also has mandated that students demonstrate what they know. STAGE WRITE is a standards-based program addressing English Language Arts Standards and Theater Standards. STAGE WRITE provides many opportunities for performance assessment. STAGE WRITE activities are specifically designed to immerse the students in playwriting. Students, through discussion and improvisation, develop characters, plot, setting, and theme, and write dialogue to show the story. Applied Learning standards are addressed throughout as students work together improvising, critiquing, and performing finished work.

NCTE STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Standard 3: Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

Standard 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 5: Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 6: Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

Standard 11: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR ARTS EDUCATION - THEATER

Content Standard 1: Script writing through improvising, writing, and refining scripts based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.

Content Standards 2: Acting by developing, communicating, and sustaining characters in improvisations and informal or formal productions.

Content Standard 7: Analyzing, critiquing, and constructing meanings from informal and formal theater, film, television, and electronic media productions.

STANDARDS

STANDARDS

CALIFORNIA APPLIED LEARNING STANDARDS

Standard 6. Students will understand how to apply communication skills and techniques. Students will demonstrate ability to communicate orally and in writing.

Standard 8. Students will understand the importance of teamwork. Students will work on teams to achieve project objectives.

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STAGE WRITE

STAGE WRITE has been developed to give students a successful writing experience. The primary focus is on writing, not on performing. The theatre games and performance opportunities in every lesson feed into the writing process. For example, improvisation is introduced as “playwriting on your feet.”

The secondary focus is to engage students in theatre as an art. The arts invite students to use all of their individual resources—their intellects, imaginations, emotions, senses, and bodies. Since no two people are exactly alike, expect a multitude of responses to open-ended learning tasks as students tap into their multiple intelligences. Additionally, through STAGE WRITE your students will not only learn the craft of playwriting, they will gain appreciation for the achievements of famous playwrights.

For the culminating event, a performance, STAGE WRITE offers several options including the use of adult actors.

In this unit, students will experience the following:

Knowledge

- Drama is built on the same elements as fiction: character, conflict, setting, plot, theme
- Drama *shows* us a story, whereas fiction *tells* a story
- Conflict is essential to drama
- Dialogue is the primary tool of the playwright
- Improvisation is a useful writing tool
- Play scripts have a particular format

Skills

- Strengthen reasoning and communication skills
- Write about characters and ideas of importance
- Activate the imagination, traveling beyond daily routines
- Develop an ear for speech patterns
- Strengthen basic skills necessary in all forms of effective writing (e.g., logical development of ideas, careful word choice, and use of sensory details)

Attitudes

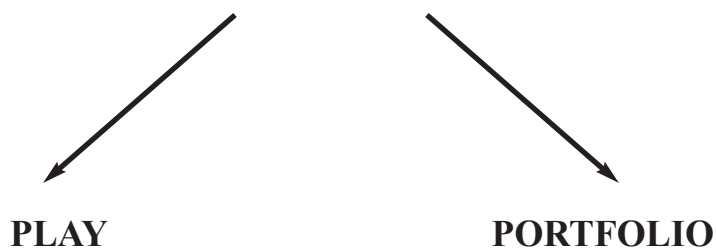
- Commit to every step in the learning process
- Work to capacity and beyond
- Take risks
- Value personal creations
- Take pride in the group’s accomplishments
- Discover one another’s values, emotions, and visions of the future
- Explore and analyze consequences of real-life choices through fictional characters

STAGE WRITE PURPOSE

Starting with an introduction to playwriting and dramatic elements, STAGE WRITE gradually immerses your students in the world of dramatic writing. Students write dialogue, develop characters, build conflict, and use improvisation as they work towards creating a portfolio of dramatic writing, or writing a three scene play. Students are guided through the writing process within a series of 10 lessons. Each lesson builds on what was presented in previous lessons to the final performance of the student scenes or plays.

Content in Lessons

1. What Goes into a Play?
 - Introduction to Playwriting
 - Elements of Drama
 - Writing Dialogue
2. How Do I Develop Characters?
 - Roles We Play
 - Play Idea Chart
 - Creating Characters
3. Playwriting on Your Feet
 - Using Improvisation
 - Making Improvisation Work
4. Writing Dialogue and Action
 - Revealing Information Through Dialogue
 - Format for Writing Plays



(continued on next page)

PLAY

5. Creating Your Main Character
 - Creating your Main Character
 - Structure of a Three Scene Play
 - Write Scene One
6. Building Conflict
 - Reading Scenes Aloud
 - Building Conflict
 - Write Scene Two
7. Trouble Shooting
 - Using Improvisation as a Tool for Writer's Block
 - Character Profile and Interview
 - Write Scene Three
8. Setting
 - How to Revise
 - Neutral Scene
 - Revise Scene One
9. Revision
 - Do It/Don't Do It
 - Rhythm Scene
 - Revise Scene Two
10. Finishing Touches
 - Choosing a Title
 - Preparing a Title Page
 - Preparing the Manuscript
 - Revise Scene Three

PORTFOLIO

5. Dramatic Structure
 - Reading Scenes Aloud
 - Graph of Dramatic Structure
6. Creating Characters
 - Begin to Create Characters
 - Visualize a Main Character
 - Write a Monologue
7. Building Conflict
 - Identify and Use Effective Conflict in Improvisations
 - Write Scene One
8. Using Action
 - Practice Appropriate Evaluation and Feedback of Others' Work
 - Using Action and Setting Effectively
 - Write Scene Two
9. Review and Revision
 - Select Strong Example of Own Work to Revise
 - Begin Revision
 - Do It/Don't Do It
10. Finishing Touches
 - Continue Revision Process
 - Choose Title for Selected Piece
 - Prepare Title Page
 - Rhythm Scene

Performance

- Choosing What to Present
- Finding Actors
- Students as Actors

OVERVIEW

SETUP DIRECTIONS

STAGE WRITE

1. Preparation Reading

Knowing the contents of this Teacher Notebook will help you make choices as you go along. From the material here, you will select:

- Sample scenes for students to read aloud
- Warm up activities
- Time schedule
- Play or portfolio outcome
- Actors or students for final performance

2. Being Flexible

Most of the exercises can be used more than once, and in various sequences. Feel free to move them around and to adapt them to your students, schedule, or curriculum needs. For example, if students are studying the Revolutionary period, you might structure an improvisation set in that historical period.

As you read through the lessons, you will see that certain concepts may be taught in a sequence different from the one presented. Feel free to make changes.

We suggest scheduling lessons twice weekly, to build and sustain the momentum that usually develops with creative work. However, adjust the schedule as necessary, particularly if you need additional time to comment on written work before returning it to students.

Selecting Play or Portfolio Outcome

Students may work towards

- a portfolio of dramatic writing *or*
- a short play

Both outcomes provide students with challenge and concrete accomplishments. Both lead to culminating performances. However, the portfolio does not require students to write an entire play. You, as teacher, will decide which assignments should be in a completed portfolio, depending on students' achievement levels and the time allotted to this unit.

In the portfolio option, less attention is directed towards developing the story line, or plot. Making a portfolio steers students away from writing that is all plot and nothing more. We see this imbalance too often in television and film, where physical action, usually violent, fuels the story.

All student work goes into the portfolio, making it an attainable goal for students of varying achievement levels. Nothing prevents eager writers from shaping the assignments into a short play.

The portfolio

- allows more flexibility of pace as you work through the unit
- allows more flexibility in content
- allows for as much student revision as you feel necessary
- focuses more on the development of character, setting, and relationships than on plot
- has self-contained assignments, useful for students with erratic attendance
- adapts easily to students at all achievement levels
- portfolio scenes can be separate from one another

The play

- offers more *initial* motivation
- sounds more exciting, especially to reluctant writers
- has built-in momentum
- moves at a faster pace
- focuses on the development of plot along with character, setting, and relationships
- teaches more about overall dramatic structure
- has cumulative assignments
- works best with students who generally complete independent assignments

Read the unit with your students in mind. Select the outcome—portfolio or play—that is best suited to *your students'* needs and *your* level of comfort.

Lessons 1–4 are the same for either outcome. By the time you reach lesson 5 you must make a decision as to which outcome you choose for your class. The directions for lessons 5–10 are based on your outcome choice. You will find the Daily Directions for lessons 5–10 for the play outcome first, followed by the Daily Directions for lessons 5–10 for the portfolio outcome. Choose either the play or the portfolio outcome for your class (not both).

Several exercises are used in only the play or portfolio outcome. Feel free to make substitutions and move activities from one outcome to the other.

SETUP DIRECTIONS

STAGE WRITE

3. Taking Your Time

As teachers, we have powerful tools at our disposal. One is the ability to ask challenging questions. Another is the ability to see what is going on, at any moment, with an individual learner.

Take your time when leading discussions during this unit. The questions suggested are carefully worded. Ask them once and let them sink in. They are designed to draw out each student's experiences, ideas, and imagination. This takes time. You may be surprised by the response.

Good teaching, like good theatre, thrives on energy exchanged between learner and teacher. Sometimes the energy travels best through silence.

As an experienced teacher, you know the difference between the silence of analytical thinking and the silence of confusion, or boredom. If it's the former, give thanks. If it's the latter, give additional examples (many are included in your Teacher Notebook), or rephrase a question, or coach students from one step to the next.

Take as long as you like with a given lesson, especially if students are creating portfolios. Portfolios can include multiple drafts of the same scene, or several responses to the same exercise. Feel free to adjust the pace, even skipping lessons if time dictates.

4. What If? Concerns about Classroom Management

My Students Get Silly When They Do Plays

Television often elevates silliness to a virtue. This unit shows students that plays need not be silly to hold our attention.

Clowning around often hides discomfort. Make students comfortable by creating a safe environment, conducive to taking risks. Teach students how to listen to, and discuss, one another's work. Rather than labeling a piece good or bad, use an active vocabulary drawn from the process of making theatre (e.g., What kept you listening? Did any moment jump out at you?).

Expect students to experience success (included in the Teacher Notebook are guidelines to avoid embarrassment). Every session includes warm ups designed to teach concentration and bring students "into the moment." Learning tasks are structured to channel students' energy into positive responses. Most students find that working on these tasks, often in pairs or groups, is much more fun than fooling around.



Students generally rise to the expectations set for them. Creating a serious theatrical writing environment increases the likelihood of successful student outcomes.

What About Violence?

Many students see television and movies, with their abundance of violence, but little or no theatre. Understandably, they think that plays should include violence. Help students understand that *conflict* is essential to drama, but physical violence is not.

One definition of conflict is the tension between people who have opposing needs. If a student wants to write about a potentially violent relationship, ask him to create the scene just before, or just after, the act of violence. The writer's challenge is to show why the violence occurred, or how it might have been prevented.

Students who have witnessed or experienced violence have deeper reasons for equating violence with conflict. Give students nonviolent models to emulate, including excerpts from plays by adults and other students (included in this Teacher Notebook), situations improvised in class, and, most exciting, scenes from their own writing as it evolves.

I Don't Know Enough About Playwriting to Teach It

If you do any kind of creative writing, and if you see plays, you know more than you realize. Remember that taking risks is part of the learning process, for you as well as your students. Your goal is not to create playwrights. It's to connect students with their individual voices as they put characters into action.

Do I Need to Act?

As a teacher, you already have performance skills. You read aloud, you convey information, and you command attention through words and actions. Occasionally in this unit, you are encouraged to improvise scenes with students. You'll work from the perspective of a writer, not an actor, using a process explained in this Teacher Notebook step by step. Knowing how to act is not necessary.

What About "Inappropriate" Subjects?

If addressed with insight and honesty, almost any subject may be appropriate for a particular writer to explore. Teenagers worry about controversial issues like sexuality, death, divorce, fidelity, and religion. Writing about them can lead to deeper understanding.

SETUP DIRECTIONS

STAGE WRITE

However, if you think a student has chosen a topic just because it is sensational, ask the student if his/her main character is *someone (s)he can know well and care about*. Questions about the character's history, or qualities the writer can admire, may prompt the writer to drop the issue if it has no personal relevance. An extreme example was a troubled 9th grader whose character began as a rapist in prison, but quickly became a boy who gives a party to which no one comes.

You may choose to make certain topics off limits from the start. For example, if substance abuse is a hot topic in your school, and you anticipate knee-jerk plays about users who die, eliminate the topic (except for the student who convinces you, privately, that (s)he must write about drugs). If you hear complaints, suggest writing about the tensions that lead up to drug use.

Students sometimes request that their work not be read aloud. If a piece is strong, or touches on important issues, try to change the writer's mind, especially if (s)he will benefit from his/her classmates' response (however, use judgment regarding when to push and when to respect student privacy). Offer to read the work yourself (to ensure a serious performance). The writer has the final word, of course.

5. Scheduling Your Time

Allow seven weeks for STAGE WRITE. We recommend at least two lessons per week, rather than one, to build momentum.

Teacher preparation

- Read through the entire unit
- Contact sources for adult actors (see Performance on page 2:76 for more information)
- Schedule the final performance (tentatively)

<i>Week 1</i>	Lessons 1, 2	At least one day between lessons
<i>Week 2</i>	Lessons 3, 4	At least one day between lessons
<i>Week 3</i>	Lessons 5, 6	At least two days between lessons
<i>Week 4</i>	Lessons 7, 8	At least two days between lessons
<i>Week 5</i>	Lessons 9, 10	At least two days between lessons
<i>Week 6</i>	Students work independently to prepare scripts for performance	
<i>Week 7</i>	Performance	



Be sure students have time to write between classroom sessions. They can do this at home or in class, depending on your students' independent work skills.

Allow time to read and respond to student work between classroom sessions.

6. Aligning STAGE WRITE with Curriculum Framework and Standards

STAGE WRITE supports many content and performance standards in Language Arts and Visual and Performing Arts (Theatre).

Components in STAGE WRITE can be adapted easily to support learning in the following areas.

- Social Studies, History
 - monologues/scenes/plays written about historical characters and/or events
 - set up Twelve Line Scene (see Lesson 1) so that A and B live in Boston in 1772 (or some other time and place)
 - write a Character Profile and Conduct a Character Interview (both in Lesson 7-Play) with a historical figure (e.g., Harriet Tubman), visualize a character (see Lesson 6-Portfolio)
- Science/Ethics
 - set up Do It/Don't Do It (see Lesson 9-Play and Lesson 9-Portfolio) to deal with a controversial scientific issue (e.g., where C is the single mother of Siamese twins. A is a doctor who knows that both twins will die if they are not separated by a surgical procedure, during which the weaker baby will lose her heart and lungs and be unable to live. A says permit the surgery. B is the leader of C's religious congregation. B thinks the surgery is wrong because it will kill one of the babies, and killing is wrong. B says forbid the surgery)
- Literature
 - monologues/scenes/plays written about characters and/or events in literature
 - visualize a character in literature while working on Lesson 5-Play: Creating Your Main Character or Lesson 6-Portfolio: Visualizing A Main Character (e.g., students visualize Lenny in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* at the beginning of the book. He is doing something he enjoys. Students describe Lenny in response to the ten questions they will hear. Students create details that fit their understanding of Lenny as a character)

7. Considering the Benefits

As children, we learn about the world by inventing characters and moving through fictional situations. As adults, we continue to learn through the powerful art of theatre.

Playwriting engages students because:

- Plays are about people in relationships. Through fictional characters, students examine motivations, explore relationships, and try out behavior.
- Playwriting challenges students to write about characters and ideas of importance *to them*.
- Playwriting activates the imagination, inviting students to travel beyond their daily routines.
- Plays require conflict; so does growing up. Students are rarely at a loss for material.
- The playwright has total control. By contrast, students often feel powerless in their own lives.
- Writing dialogue requires skills not generally rewarded in school, such as an ear for speech patterns. Students who regard themselves as poor writers sometimes shine as playwrights.
- Plays are written to be read aloud and performed, leading students to discover one another's values, emotions, and visions of the future.
- Playwriting draws students into theatre, a great and communal art form.

Keep in mind that playwriting:

- *Promotes empathy*
To create a compelling character, the writer must reveal an aspect we can admire or value, regardless of the character's role in the plot.
- *Promotes critical thinking and problem solving*
Most plots focus on a character who recognizes a problem, attempts to solve it, and fails or succeeds. The audience is engaged by the tactics chosen and the ensuing struggle. From *Hamlet* to *The Lion King*, this is problem solving.
- *Leads young people to value their own experiences*
Everyone's family and neighborhood has people in relationships. Everyone has the resources for creating drama (personal experience, knowledge, and imagination).

8. Assessing Students' Writing

Assessing creative work always involves a degree of subjectivity.

In evaluating student work, look for four overall qualities:

- a. A strong connection to the material, a “sense of truth”
- b. Imagination
- c. Fresh use of language
- d. Effective use of dramatic form

To be more specific, use the rubric below to assess student writing. Additionally, be sure to review this rubric with students (see WRITING GUIDELINES). This will ensure that students are aware of your expectations.

a. A strong connection to the material

- Writer reveals empathy for characters, makes them believable in context of scene/play
- Characters have individual attributes, habits (see Lesson 4, Improvisation with dialogue)
- Dialogue is specific to each character (see Lesson 9-Play or Lesson 10-Portfolio, Rhythm Scene)
- Characters are multi-dimensional, even when based in fantasy (see Lesson 5-Play or Lesson 6-Portfolio, Visualize Your Main Character)
(see Lesson 7-Play, Character Profile and Interviews)
(see Lesson 9-Play and Lesson 9-Portfolio, Do It/Don't Do It)
- Writer explores material he/she knows “from the heart” (see Lesson 2, Roles You Play)

b. Imagination

- Writer shows imagination through choice of characters, situations, and setting
(see Lesson 1, Twelve-Line Scene)
(see Lesson 5-Play, Creating Main Character)
(see Lesson 6-Portfolio, Visualizing a Main Character)

c. Fresh use of language

- Writer uses specific details, sensory descriptions; avoids trite, predictable dialogue



Each year as Playwrights Project evaluates submissions to our playwriting contest for teenagers, we're not surprised when an inventive script receives a 1 (top rank) and a 5 (lowest rank) from different final judges.

Post this rubric on the wall(s) of your classroom for easy reference.

d. Effective use of dramatic form

- Central character goes after something of importance to him/her
(see Lesson 2, Planning What Happens)
(see Lesson 3, Alternative situation to The Shoe Store)
(see Lesson 5-Portfolio)
- Central character tries to overcome obstacles
(see Lesson 6-Play or Lesson 7-Portfolio, Building Conflict)
- Actions of central character create dramatic tension
(see Lesson 6-Play or Lesson 7-Portfolio, Improvisation Two: Raising the Stakes)
- Environment (setting) contributes to the story and is reflected in the dialogue
(see Lesson 8-Play or Lesson 9-Portfolio, Revision)
(see Lesson 8-Play, Neutral Scene)
- Necessary background information (exposition) is revealed through dialogue
- Key events are *shown*, not told
(see Lesson 4, Improvisation with Dialogue)
(see Lesson 8-Play, Neutral Scene)

9. Creating Playwriting Residencies

This unit was borne from the playwriting residencies run by Playwrights Project in San Diego, California. The residencies have allowed an active collaboration between classroom teachers and the theatre. The residency begins with a planning session in which the classroom teacher and a Teaching Artist meet and establish their agenda. The residency may begin with an introductory session in which actors present model scenes, by teens and adults, to illustrate live theatre. The Teaching Artist then conducts 8–14 classroom sessions (50–60 minutes), ending with readings of the students’ work. These may be performed by professional actors (the most popular finale) or by the students.

STAGE WRITE places the power in your hands. You will find everything you need to run this unit on your own without the outside assistance of a theatre group. However, if you wish to obtain assistance, you will find information within this unit to assist you in doing so. It is recommended that you find actors for the final performance as it is very powerful for students to see their writing performed by those who are skilled at this craft. You may begin your search with your local theatre group, your local college or university theatre department, and/or your local high school drama/theatre teacher. Included in this Teacher Notebook is an example of a letter that you can use to begin dialog with any of these individuals/entities (see Theatre Letter for reference).

10. Choosing Sample Scenes

In this Teacher Notebook you will find Sample Scenes and a monologue which are for use as reference by your students. These provide models of strong playwriting. Two or more of these scenes should be read aloud in Lesson 1. Be sure to carefully read through the description of each scene before choosing which scenes you will provide to your students. Additionally, you can use these scenes as examples of character development, setting, plot, and dialogue (see **About the Sample Scenes** page 4:1 for more information).

11. Locating Examples of Student Writing

In this Teacher Notebook you will find Examples of Student Writing for **your** reference (see the **Student Examples** section of this Teacher Notebook). These are included to give you an idea of what to expect in response to specific activities. What might a Twelve-Line or Rhythm Scene look like?

12. Duplication

Make copies of the following pages in the quantity indicated in *Italics*.

- Sample Scenes (two scenes chosen by teacher for Lesson 1; from Sample Scenes) — *two of each scene*
- PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY — *class set*
- WRITING GUIDELINES — *class set*
- Sample Scene (one scene chosen by teacher for Lesson 4; from Sample Scenes) — *class set*
- WHAT IS A SCENE? — *class set*
- GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE — *class set*
- FEEDBACK — *class set*

13. Materials

Carefully note the materials you need to conduct this unit.

- Student folders — *class set*
 - Manila file folder *or*
 - Envelopes, large (10" x 13") *or*
 - Pocket folders
- Overhead projector or board (for most lessons) — *one*
- Tape (masking; for Lesson 7) — *one*
- Watch or clock with second hand (for Lesson 9) — *one*



Your students may find the student author biographical information found on About the Sample Scenes interesting. Provide this information to your students as interest dictates.



These examples were written by teenagers during playwriting residencies taught by Playwrights Project. Students need not see these examples, however if they do they will see the "height of the bar."



When duplicating scripts it works best if you not copy pages back to back, instead copy onto one side of the page only. Although this requires more paper, it is the preferred playwriting format and makes for easier reading.

SETUP DIRECTIONS

STAGE WRITE

14. **Preparing Student Folders**

Before beginning STAGE WRITE, prepare the student folders. You can use manila file folders, large envelopes, or pocket folders for this purpose. These folders will be kept in the classroom and provide students with a place to safely keep their work in progress (play or portfolio). Find a central location within the classroom for these student folders. It is suggested that these folders be kept in a hanging file folder. This provides you with access to all student work for assessment purposes.

1. Using the Warm Ups

Warm ups are quick kinesthetic activities used to develop a variety of skills. The objectives of the activities within this unit include:

- Focus and concentration
- Observation
- Listening and thinking on your feet
- Group trust
- Teamwork
- Memory

Warm ups build a safe environment for taking intellectual and emotional risks. They energize students, promote concentration on the group task, exercise the imagination and, perhaps most important, build trust. Many of the warm ups have been adapted from theatre classes.

Specific warm ups are suggested toward the beginning of each lesson. Spend about 10 minutes on each warm up activity. Working physically together (and usually laughing together) establishes the safe environment necessary for creative writing. Below is a list of each lesson and its warm up. For a complete listing of the warm ups and their directions, see Warm Ups (on page 1:24).

- Lesson 1 — Color, Fruit
- Lesson 2 — Change the Movement
- Lesson 3 — Elephant/Airplane/Bippity, Boppity, Boo
- Lesson 4 — Changes
- Lesson 5 (Play and Portfolio) — Trust Circle
- Lesson 6 (Play and Portfolio) — Tiger, Traps, People
- Lesson 7 (Play and Portfolio) — Cross the Line
- Lesson 8 (Play and Portfolio) — Gotcha!
- Lesson 9 (Play and Portfolio) — Yes!
- Lesson 10 (Play and Portfolio) — When I Dance

Many of the warm ups may be repeated. A new warm up is included for each lesson, however much is to be gained by repeating warm ups, especially at the requests of students. The beauty of the warm ups is that the outcome varies from one time to the next, as the skills practiced grow increasingly strong.



Try not to skip the warm ups.



Use the warm ups interchangeably and repeatedly.



At Playwrights Project, we call improvisation “playwriting on your feet,” to eliminate the idea that students need to be good actors to improvise effectively.



Throughout the unit you will notice that when students work in pairs it is referred to as working in “2s.” This is consistent with theatrical terminology.

2. Using Improvisation, or “Playwriting on Your Feet”

Improvisation (making something up on the spur of the moment) is a useful tool in many learning situations. Once comfortable with it, students can use improvisation to generate ideas, find options when they are stuck, find nonviolent ways to resolve conflict, and bring energy into the classroom.

Performers and playwrights often use improvisation to strengthen their craft. Entire stage pieces have been created through improvisation. In 1963, Viola Spolin published the influential book *Improvisation for the Theatre*. This and others by Spolin are still widely used by teachers of adults and children

Since students are often reluctant to improvise in front of a group, in STAGE WRITE improvisations are structured so that the whole class works at once, in pairs. After all the pairs have explored the situation, you may ask several to recreate their improvisations for the class, using the same ideas but not exactly the same language. Working in pairs generates many creative ideas, feels safe to students not ready to perform before an audience, engages everyone in the creative process, and allows the teacher to move among the students, helping where needed. Improvising in 2s comes from another classic, Brian Way’s *Development through Drama*.

3. Roles Students Play

- *Students as Actors* When students improvise an exercise or scene in front of the class, they are acting and creating text simultaneously. Remind students that in this unit, the playwright’s role is the more important one; they don’t need to be “good actors.”

When students read aloud scripts in progress, their job is to let the writer hear the dialogue as written. They need to:

- Focus on the task (that’s why we do the warm ups)
- Trust the script
- Stay in character

Actors overcome nervousness by learning how to concentrate. If a student giggles, stop the scene, ask the student if (s)he can concentrate, and continue. Most students will regain their focus. Replace the student if the giggling continues, the material may touch a nerve.

STAGE WRITE

Before starting to read a script, actors should wait for complete attention from the audience. Observing this convention adds theatricality to the reading. Actors begin by reading aloud the title, author, characters, setting, and what is seen “at rise.” To help the audience imagine the physical world of the play, actors read aloud only the important stage directions. These include exits, entrances, and major actions (she hides behind the door, he puts his arms around her). When possible, actors follow (but don’t read aloud) directions for line readings.

- *Students as Audience Members* If necessary, remind students that actors in live theatre are right there in the room, in contrast to actors on television and film. The energy that flows between the actors and the audience is part of the overall experience. When the audience listens actively, the actors respond by giving the best performance they can.

Active listening builds an environment in which students dare to take artistic risks. Your job is to create and maintain such an environment.

Therefore, if you need to ask actors to begin again, or to remove a disruptive student from the room, do so. Good habits will develop quickly. Most important, your students will reap enormous rewards (e.g., permission to feel emotions, courage to explore serious issues, and opportunities to exchange honest evaluations of work in progress).

- *Students as Respondents* Playwriting is rewriting. Audience feedback, both nonverbal and analytical, should help the writer revise. Consider the class as a writing group, with each individual moving among the roles of writer, actor, audience member, and respondent.

The teacher is responsible for modeling how to evaluate work. Trust your common sense and the suggestions that follow.

If the silence after a reading is appreciative, savor it for a moment before you start the discussion. Empathizing with characters is just as important as analyzing them.

Acknowledge the work with a sincere comment to the writer, such as:

- Thank you... *or*
- Wow! (after a powerful, surprising, or moving script)... *or*
- What an unusual character (relationship... setting)... *or*
- That was fun!

The operative word above is *sincere*. Often “Thank you” is more than enough. Applause is not necessary.

4. Giving and Eliciting Feedback

- *Focus on the Strengths First* Ask the audience a *process* question, phrased to elicit *only positive responses*. Be prepared with your own opinion, just in case the class remains silent.

Examples include:

- What kept you listening? *This is open-ended and requires thought before answering.*
- Did you identify with one character in particular? Why?
- Was there one moment that jumped out at you?
- What made you laugh? *When the class has responded with laughter to a funny moment, or giggled nervously at a tense one.*
- If you think the writer handled one element especially well, see if the class agrees: Was there one element of drama that was particularly effective?
- How about the setting, why did it work so well? What would have been lost if the action had been elsewhere?
- Regarding structure, ask open-ended questions that focus on strengths in the work: What did Ellen want? (conflict) What else? How did she try to get it? Were you surprised by the tactic she used?
- What evidences of character did the playwright give us about Mark? Think about his history, what he said, what he didn’t say, his actions.

Avoid questions with little or no challenge. Why state the obvious? Avoid asking the same structural question after each scene, e.g., What was the conflict? Instead, consider each piece on its own merits.

Every writer enjoys genuine praise. When students say, “I liked the moment when...” or “I liked the way the father reacted,” press them to be specific. Add your own opinions.

Vary the time spent on discussing students’ pieces. Constructive criticism may not be necessary, especially if the writer already knows what didn’t work, or isn’t ready to hear suggestions.

STAGE WRITE

- *Constructive Criticism* When you want to elicit constructive criticism, ask the group questions such as:
 - Were you ever confused? When?
 - What questions do we want to have answered?
 - Did we learn enough about the characters? Spend enough time getting to know them?
 - Where in the play might this scene fit: beginning? middle? end?

Ask the writer questions such as:

- What do you want your audience to feel, or think about, as they leave the theatre?
- Do *you* like or admire your main character? Why?
Useful with characters who are entirely evil, or otherwise one-dimensional
- Why did you choose to have him do such and such?

Questions about choice are always productive. You remind the student that making art, of any kind, means making choices. You bring the student's focus back to the process. If the student answers, "I don't know," encourage him/her to think about it.

Give the writer an opportunity to justify his/her choices. For example, a thoughtful audience member once said, "Mothers don't act like that." Perhaps not in the speaker's experience. She would not choose to write the mother in question, but the playwright *did*. Now the writer's job is to justify the mother's behavior by pulling us more deeply into the world of the play. If the writer shows us the character in relationships, and gives us time to know her, we may accept her behavior as not only believable, but inevitable—the ultimate goal.

5. Culmination

Dramatic writing is written to be performed. In STAGE WRITE, students concentrate on writing. Performing requires different skills. That is why it is recommended that you find professional actors for the final performance. Actors know how to get to the heart of a character. Students are often amazed by the quality of their dialogue when performed by professional actors, holding scripts and barely moving around the stage.

Following Lesson 10 is the Performance. The Performance directions include every aspect of the performance: choosing what to present, choosing a performance space, finding actors, preparing students to act, and gathering an audience.

To Whom It May Concern,

I am an English teacher at _____ Middle School/High School in _____ (city). My students are currently studying a unit on drama. The students have had _____ playwriting lessons with me. They have studied the elements of a play and written _____ scenes/scenes of a one-act play of their own.

We would love to have some theatre professionals come to our school to perform the scenes/plays we have written. We have heard amazing comments about the life that actors can breathe into dialogue! It can be a simple staged-reading done in the classroom. The students are also very interested in the ins and outs of being a director, actor, producer, and lighting or set designer. Your expertise would be a great way to finish our playwriting unit. Our class meets on _____ (days) from _____ to _____ (time).

We can provide you with the scripts ahead of time if you prefer. We can also provide you with a stipend of _____ dollars for the hour. You can contact me at _____ (school number) or _____ (home number) if you have any questions or recommendations for us.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to your call.

Sincerely,

_____ and the class

AUTHOR'S NOTES

STAGE WRITE

My love of theatre began the first time I performed on stage in kindergarten. I continued to act through my college years while I majored in English literature at Oberlin. After a brief stint as an actor in New York City, I realized that my temperament was ill-suited to that role. Looking for a profession that welcomed my energy, I began a graduate degree at the Bank Street College of Education, where I discovered that I was a natural teacher.

After two years of teaching at the Bank Street Laboratory School for Children, during which my 4th-5th graders wrote and performed their version of a children's adaptation of Homer's *Iliad*, I left the classroom to specialize in arts education and teacher training. In 1985 I started an arts outreach program which grew into Playwrights Project, the nonprofit organization I direct. Playwrights Project promotes literacy, creativity, and communication skills in young people through drama-based activities. Our programs include creative drama and playwriting residencies in schools, the California Young Playwrights Contest, and professional productions of students' scripts.

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I am extremely grateful to Fia Lefkowitz for her assistance in the development of this unit. A dynamic Teaching Artist on staff at Playwrights Project, she has contributed to the sequencing of concepts, the structure of lessons, and the selection of material written by students.

Many of the other writers, directors, and performers who have worked with Playwrights Project have contributed indirectly to STAGE WRITE. Their inspiration and generosity have been invaluable. I am also grateful to the writers who have allowed us to include their work as examples of strong writing: George C. Wolfe, Patricia Loughrey, Mabelle Reynoso, and Karin Lydersen.

Deepest thanks to my husband, Beeb Salzer, for his theatrical talents and love. From the wooden horse he built for the *Iliad* to his inventive sets for *Plays by Young Writers 2000* at the Old Globe Theatre, he remains my most treasured collaborator.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRODUCTION

STAGE WRITE

Interested students may want to explore possibilities for production and/or publication. We suggest looking through *The Playwright's Companion* (New York: Feedback Theatrebooks), which includes programs and contests for young writers. Bookstores may also provide leads. We recommend Samuel French Theatre & Film Bookshops.

Playwriting contests for young people often reward winning writers with a script reading or production, constructive feedback from professionals, opportunities to take part in the production process, and a stipend. Rules and deadlines change, so be sure to contact the sponsoring organization regarding specific requirements. A few contests to consider are:

California Young Playwrights Contest

Playwrights Project, 450 B St., #1020, San Diego, CA 92101 (619)239-8222

www.playwrightsproject.com

Playwrights Project also sponsors Changing Voices, a contest for students entering grades 6-8. Call for details regarding eligibility.

Annual Blank Theatre Company Young Playwrights Festival

1301 Lucile Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90026 (213)662-7734

Baker's Plays High School Playwriting Contest

Baker's Plays, 100 Chauncy St., Boston, MA 02111-1783 (617)482-7613

Roy Barker Playwriting Prize

Rocky Mountain Student Theatre Program, Box 1724, Colorado Springs, CO 80901

email- owenperk@aol.com

The Scholastic Art and Writing Awards

555 Broadway, NY, NY 10012

Very Special Arts Playwrights Discovery Award

1300 Connecticut Ave., #700, Washington D.C. 20036 (800)933-8721

Young Playwrights Festival

Young Playwrights, Inc., 321 West 44th St., NY, NY 10036 (212)307-1140

BIBLIOGRAPHY

STAGE WRITE

Books relevant to this unit abound. Most include useful advice and activities. Here are a few of the author's favorite titles.

Goldberg, Natalie. *Wild Mind*. Boston: Shambhala Press, 1989.

Two books that draw people of all ages into the process of writing.

Goldberg, Naomi. *Writing Down the Bones*. Boston: Shambhala Press, 1986.

Graves, Donald. *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*. Portsmouth, NH:

Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.

A beautiful book about what students and teachers learn from the writing process.

Sklar, Daniel Judah. *Playmaking: Children Writing and Performing Their Own Plays*. New York, NY:

Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1991.

Sklar is the playwright and teacher who founded the 52nd Street Project in New York City. He describes a 20-week playwriting residency with fifth graders.

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theatre*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963, 1983.

Spolin, Viola. *Theatre Games for the Classroom*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1986.

Spolin popularized the use of improvisation, or theatre games, as a learning tool.

Classics in the field, her highly readable books include hundreds of activities.

Way, Brian. *Development through Drama*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1967.

Clear, inspiring discussion of the importance of drama in education, along with practical classroom exercises from a pioneer in child drama.

WARM UPS

STAGE WRITE



The objective(s) of each warm up is noted in parentheses.



As the students gain momentum, the teacher can cross hands or point to two students at once.



The person in the middle will be watching the eyes of the participants so it helps not to stare directly at the leader.

These exercises have been gathered and adapted over many years. Use them anytime to focus the group on the task at hand, to promote individual concentration, to break the ice, to wake up a sluggish class, or to lighten the mood.

1. **Color, Fruit (Focus)**

The goal of this exercise is for students to respond to fast-moving, visual cues. As the pace quickens, students work harder to maintain focus.

Students form a circle, with the teacher in the center. Each student names a favorite color and fruit. These two words will be called out on cue throughout the exercise. The teacher points to a student with one hand or the other. When the right hand is used, the student pointed to calls out his/her favorite color. When the left hand is used, the student pointed to calls out his/her favorite fruit.

Start slowly. Increase pace as students become more focused and energized. You may eliminate students who don't respond, or who call out a color when a fruit is indicated.

2. **Change the Movement (Observation)**

The goal of this exercise is to discover who is leading the movement of the circle.

The class stands in a circle. One student leaves the room and a leader is selected. The leader starts a repetitive movement (e.g., clapping hands, tapping foot, nodding head) and the class follows. The student outside enters the middle of the circle and tries to find the leader by turning slowly around the circle. The leader should change the movement whenever the person in the middle is not facing him/her and the class should follow. The student in the middle has three chances to find the leader. Once the three chances are up or the leader is discovered, the process repeats itself with a new student leaving and a new leader being chosen.

3. **Elephant/Airplane/Bippity Boppity Boo (Listening, Thinking quickly on your feet)**

The goal of this exercise is to respond to aural and visual cues by assuming a set position.

STAGE WRITE

The class stands in a circle with the teacher in the middle. The teacher points to one student and says, “Elephant.” The student immediately sticks one arm straight out to be a trunk, while the adjacent two students become ears. The student on the right makes his/her right arm into an ear by lifting it up and bending it so the hand touches his/her head. The student on the left does the same with his/her left arm.

Then the teacher points to another student and says, “Airplane.” The selected student uses his/her hands to make goggles on his/her eyes, while the adjacent students become wings. The student on the right extends his/her right arm straight out; the student on the left extends his/her left arm.

Finally, the teacher points to another student in the circle and says, “Bippity Boppity Boo.” The challenge for this student is to say “boo” before the teacher does.

Now the teacher points to students in any order and calls out any one of the commands: Elephant, Airplane, or Bippity, Boppity, Boo. Once students are able to respond with the correct movements or words, speed up the exercise.

4. **Changes (Observation)**

The goal of this exercise is for each student to correctly guess his/her partner’s changes in appearance.

Students form two lines, facing one another, with space between people. Each partner observes the other front and back, without talking for 30 seconds, paying careful attention to details. On cue from the teacher, the rows turn their backs to one another while each person makes three subtle but visible changes in his/her appearance (e.g., clothing, hair, jewelry, shoes). Again on cue, partners face one another. Each tries to identify the changes made by his/her partner. If a student is stumped, his/her partner reveals the change.

Now the first person in one line walks to the end of the line, while others in that line move up to stand opposite new partners. The sequence is repeated, with each student making three additional changes. (This may require imagination and is usually fun.) If there is time, repeat sequence a third time.



This exercise can be made more difficult by eliminating students if they do the incorrect movement of hesitate too long.



Once a student makes a change in his/her appearance, it remains for the entire exercise (i.e. each change must be completely new).



This exercise is much more effective if all the students are absolutely silent.

5. Trust Circle (Group trust)

The goal of this exercise is for the leader, whose eyes are closed, to tag a student by moving quickly and listening.

The class stands in a circle. The teacher gives each student a number from 1–6. The teacher calls all the 1s into the middle of the circle and chooses one of the 1s as the leader. All of the 1s move around within the circle, staying clear of the leader. With eyes closed, the leader also moves within the circle, trying to touch another 1.

The students remaining in the circle form the wall. They put their hands in front of their bodies, palms facing toward the circle.

When the leader approaches the encircling “wall,” hands gently push the leader back into the circle. The students pushing may also say, “Wall.”

When the leader tags a student in the middle of the circle, group 1 rejoins the circle and group 2 repeats the sequence.

The exercise is over when each number has gone into the middle of the circle.

6. Tiger, Traps, People (Teamwork)

The goal of this exercise is for one team to win three points. Points are acquired through luck and a bit of strategy.

Divide the class in half, with teams standing on either side of the room. This exercise is similar to the children’s game “Rock, Paper, Scissors,” which students may remember. Here the teams will choose to be Tigers, Traps, or People.

Explain that **Tigers** put their hands out in front of them like tiger paws and roar. They eat people. **People** put their arms down at their sides. They set traps. **Traps** put their arms directly out in front of them and clap their hands together like a trap. They catch tigers.

Each group huddles for 15 seconds to decide what to be. On cue, the groups face each other in the stance of Tigers, People, or Traps. The stronger group wins a point. If groups choose the same stance, neither wins.

The relative strengths are:

- Tigers eat People (Tigers win the point)
- People set Traps (People win)
- Traps capture Tigers (Traps win)

When one group acquires three points, the warm up is over.

7. Cross the Line (Concentration, Focus)

Prior to beginning this warm up, clear a wide area of space in the classroom and put a line of masking tape on the floor across one end of the room. The goal of this exercise is to cross the line of tape without being seen by the leader.

One student (the leader) stands behind the tape. Five students line up at the opposite end of the room, facing the line. The leader turns his/her back to the group. The five students start moving (walking, jumping, crawling) towards the line of tape. The leader turns around periodically to face the group.

The students freeze as soon as they see the leader begin to turn. If one student is still in motion when the leader turns around, the student goes to where (s)he started. The first person to cross the line of tape while the leader's back is turned is the new leader.

Five new people go to the starting place and the exercise is repeated.

8. Gotcha (Observation)

The goal of this exercise is to find the Gotcha before the Gotcha finds you.

Students close their eyes and put their heads down on their desks. The teacher or a designated leader walks around the classroom and taps one person on the back. The leader stands off to the side and says, "There is a Gotcha in the room." Students walk around the room, slowly and silently, observing other members of the class as they walk.

The student who was tapped, the Gotcha, walks among the others. When the Gotcha makes eye contact and winks at another person, that person continues walking for 5 seconds and then says, "Gotcha" in a loud voice and sits down. (S)He is silent for the rest of the round and cannot reveal the identity of the Gotcha to anyone.

The Gotcha continues to make eye contact and wink. The remaining students attempt to figure out the identity of the Gotcha, who should be as sneaky as possible when sending winks. If a student who is still walking around sees the Gotcha winking at someone else, (s)he says, "The Gotcha is (student's name)." If (s)he is correct, the round ends and a new one begins. If not, (s)he sits down for the rest of the round.



A clever Gotcha should be able to take at least five people out.



A student cannot move from one spot without first pointing to someone else and receiving a “Yes!”



Encourage students to make bold or silly movement choices to add variety to the dance.

9. Yes (Observation, Thinking and Moving Quickly)

The goal of this exercise is to always have a spot in the circle.

Students stand in a circle. One student (**A**) points to another student across the circle. As soon as **A** points to **B**, **B** says, “Yes!” (Students must say yes when pointed to.) **A** walks across the circle towards **B**’s spot. **B** must move before **A** gets there, but **B** may not move until **B** finds a new spot. Thus, **B** points to someone else in the circle, (**C**). **C** says, “Yes!” and **B** walks to **C**’s spot. By now, **A** has taken **B**’s spot and **B** has taken **C**’s spot. The round continues increasing in speed as students grow familiar with the process.

10. When I Dance (Memory)

The goal of this exercise is to create a “dance” by remembering and performing all the moves of the previous players.

Students stand in a circle. Student **A** says, “When I dance, I dance like this.” **A** makes one movement with his/her body (e.g., kicks leg up, throws hands in air, turns around in a circle). **A** repeats the movement several times.

The student to **A**’s right, **B**, says, “When I dance, I dance like this.” **B** repeats **A**’s movement and adds one of his/her own. The student to **B**’s right, **C**, goes next and so forth.

The warm up requires increasingly more concentration with each additional player.

After everyone has added a move, the teacher asks, “Who can do the whole dance on his/her own?” Individual students demonstrate the whole dance.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

STAGE WRITE

At Playwrights Project, we ask students to evaluate their playwriting residencies in writing. The half-dozen questions we pose vary according to the material covered and the age of the students.

These questions are quite specific.

1. Did you enjoy the sessions? Why or why not?
2. Which activities or assignments did you find most challenging? Most useful?
3. Did your writing skills improve as a result of the playwriting sessions? Explain.
4. Do you feel more confident as a writer since the playwriting sessions? Explain.
5. If you believe that students need this kind of playwriting sessions, please explain why. Imagine yourself speaking to a school principal who is not sure that playwriting is worthwhile.

These questions are more general.

1. What worked for you in the playwriting sessions?
2. What do you wish had been different?
3. Do you think other students would benefit from doing playwriting in school? Why?

These sentence starters focus more on the product.

1. The things I like about my play/scene are...
2. The biggest problems in my play/scene are...
3. Here's how I think I want to make my play/scene better...
4. What discoveries have you made about yourself as a writer during the playwriting sessions?

These sentence starters elicit thoughtful evaluations from students (of any age) who are comfortable with abstractions.

1. I learned...
2. I valued...
3. I expected...
4. I wish...

LESSON 1: WHAT GOES INTO A PLAY?

Objectives

- Introduce playwriting
- Introduce warm ups
- Experience a scene reading
- Identify the elements of a scene or play
- Discuss and write a Twelve-Line scene

Materials

- PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY — *class set*
- Sample Scenes (two scenes selected by teacher; from Sample Scenes) — *two copies per scene*
- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Procedure

1. Read or tell the following information.

We are starting a unit on playwriting. People have created and performed plays since ancient times, because plays help us understand ourselves and our world.

Now you will have a chance to develop characters and show us their stories. As a playwright, you will create your own world, and pull us into it through your writing.

Each of you will create a portfolio of scenes/dramatic writing or a short play. You will keep everything you write, in class and for homework, in a folder. The folders will be kept here (*explain the system you have set up*).

Ask students the following questions and discuss briefly.

- How many of you have seen a live play or musical?
- Do you remember being moved by a particular moment?



Estimated activity time
45–60 minutes

Introduction



10 minutes



DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 1

STAGE WRITE



How do you think that writing a play will be different from writing a story, which you have all done? (Have a brief discussion.) Narrative writing *tells* a story. Plays *show* us the story as it unfolds. Plays let us witness key moments, watch relationships develop, and form our own conclusions as to why characters behave as they do.

Movies and television also show us a story. However, they are primarily *visual*, whereas plays are primarily *aural* (heard).

2. Ask students, **What else is unique about plays?** Allow students to discuss this topic. Use the following information to guide your discussion.

- Actors and audience are **alive**, in a shared space.
- Live theatre brings people together; it is a **communal** event.
- Actors and audience **exchange energy**.

A lively, engaged audience inspires actors to give energetic performances.

- Live theatre includes risk, the possibility that anything can happen.

One live performance is never exactly the same as another.

In contrast, performances on film or tape never change.

3. Read or tell the following information.

As playwrights, you will show us a story by putting characters into action. You will write about whatever you choose, drawing on what you have experienced, what you have observed, and what you imagine.

4. Discuss the following terms with your students. Using an overhead projector or board, write the underlined words and discuss.

- Note the spelling of playwright. “Wright” means “a person who makes or constructs,” as in wheelwright and shipwright.
- The action of playwriting comes from the verb, to write, and is spelled like the verb.



DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 1

STAGE WRITE

5. Ask for four student volunteers to do a “cold” or first reading of some student scenes (scenes written by other students). These students will briefly rehearse the sample scenes you have selected in the hall before coming back into class and doing their reading. Explain that this exercise is to give the class an idea of what a reading of a scene sounds like (this is not an opportunity to judge the students’ acting). Provide the following guidance to the four volunteers:

- read aloud title, author, character descriptions, description of setting
- read aloud all the dialogue
- read aloud the stage directions, which are in parentheses or italicized, only when these describe actions (e.g., a character enters, throws a book, cries)
- *follow* the stage directions that tell the actor how to read a line
- *stand in one place*, facing the audience; don’t DO the actions

Pair the students up and provide them with their scenes (two students per scene). Send the students to the hall to rehearse the sample scenes.

6. Read or tell the following information.

We are going to do a warm up while your classmates are rehearsing the scenes. Think of warm ups as push ups for playwrights. We will do warm ups to:

- strengthen the ability to concentrate
- strengthen listening, observing, remembering skills
- develop trust, which is necessary for teamwork
- activate the imagination
- use ALL of our individual resources—the body, mind, imagination, emotions.

Professional actors use these and other exercises the way athletes stretch before a game. Warm ups are serious, fun, sometimes silly, and can be done over and over again.



You may wait until your four student volunteers are in the hall to provide guidance.



DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 1

STAGE WRITE

Warm up Objective: Focus



10 minutes



As the students gain momentum, you can cross hands or point to two students at once.

Two Sample Scenes



25 minutes



7. Color, Fruit warm up

The goal of this exercise is for students to respond to fast-moving, visual cues. As the pace quickens, students work harder to maintain focus.

Students form a circle, with the teacher in the center. Each student names a favorite color and fruit. These two words will be called out on cue throughout the exercise. The teacher points to a student with one hand or the other. When the right hand is used, the student pointed to calls out his/her favorite color. When the left hand is used, the student pointed to calls out his/her favorite fruit.

Start slowly. Increase pace as students become more focused and energized. You may eliminate students who don't respond, or who call out a color when a fruit is indicated.

8. Bring the students in from the hall. Explain to the class that in a first reading, the actors concentrate on the dialogue only. They do not move around or do any of the actions. Ask students to let the dialogue pull them into the play; their imagination will do the rest.
9. Students read aloud the first scene. Following the reading, ask the class, **What kept you listening?** (Hear a few brief responses).
10. Distribute PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY and direct students to the section on Elements of a Scene or Play. Read or tell the following information.

Let's identify the elements that make up a scene or a play.

You know what goes into a peanut butter and jelly sandwich; right? Peanut butter, jelly, bread. Everyone puts them together differently and may add extra ingredients so each sandwich is slightly different.

What are the elements, or basic ingredients, in the scene we just heard?

- **Characters** are fictional people. **What do you know about the characters in this scene?**
- **Conflict** is the tension or problem that occurs when a character doesn't get what he or she wants. **What did each character want or need? Try to get?**

- **Setting** means time and place, the environment of the play. **Where and when did the action take place?**
- **Plot** is the action that occurs, which can be physical (slams the door) or emotional (discovers he is in love). **What action occurred?**

11. Students read aloud the second scene. Following the reading, ask the class, **What held your attention this time?** (Hear a few brief responses). Together identify CCSP (Characters, Conflict, Setting, Plot) in this scene.
12. Ask students to set up a page as follows (use a board or overhead projector):

Twelve-Line Scene (title)

A
(skip two lines)

B
(skip two lines)

A
(skip two lines)

Continue until you have 6 As and 6 Bs

13. Read or tell the following information.
A and **B** are two characters. **A** wants something from **B**. **A** is having trouble getting it. Working alone, decide who **A** and **B** are, what **A** wants, and where they are. Once you have made these choices, write 12 lines of dialogue (6 for **A**, 6 for **B**).

The challenge is to *use as few words as possible* to reveal the relationship between the characters, their conflict, and the setting. The problem needn't be "solved" in 12 lines. You have 7 minutes to write. This is just an exercise. Try it. We are not writing for Broadway yet.

14. After seven minutes, have students pair up and read their partners' papers. Several pairs may read their scenes aloud. Ask the class: Was the relationship between the characters clear? The conflict? The setting? Ask the students (as writers), how many words did you use?
15. Instruct students to place completed work in their folders or take work in progress home to complete.

Twelve-Line Scene



*15–20 min. or may be completed
as homework*



This exercise is quick and light-hearted. Students write dialogue before they have time to become intimidated by the new form, or worry about whether their work is "good."

See the example of a Twelve-Line Scene for reference (in Student Examples).



Student pairs

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 2

STAGE WRITE



Estimated activity time
45–60 minutes



As a result of watching hours of television, students often think that plays must be about life and death issues only. This lesson helps students recognize the raw material for drama in their own lives.

Warm Up

Objective: Observation



10 minutes



The person in the middle will be watching the eyes of the participants so it helps not to stare directly at the leader.

Roles You Play



20 minutes



LESSON 2: HOW DO I DEVELOP CHARACTERS?

Objectives

- Draw upon life experiences in developing characters
- Plan a scene or play
- Introduce Play Idea Chart
- Work through the Play Idea Chart for three different main characters
- Generate play ideas through use of Play Idea Chart

Materials

- WRITING GUIDELINES — *class set*
- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Procedure

1. Change the Movement warm up

The goal of this exercise is to discover who is leading the movement of the circle.

The class stands in a circle. One student leaves the room and a leader is selected. The leader starts a repetitive movement (e.g., clapping hands, tapping foot, nodding head) and the class follows. The student outside enters the middle of the circle and tries to find the leader by turning slowly around the circle. The leader should change the movement whenever the person in the middle is not facing him/her and the class should follow. The student in the middle has three chances to find the leader. Once the three chances are up or the leader is discovered, the process repeats itself with a new student leaving and a new leader being chosen.

2. Read or tell the following information.

As playwrights, you will draw from three sources of information:

- What you have *experienced*
- What you have *observed* (this includes research)
- What you *imagine*

You will combine these as you develop fictional characters and situations. No one needs to know if something actually happened.

Let's look at personal experience. Think about the many roles you play in your life. (*Brainstorm a few, e.g., student, son, babysitter, dreamer*).

Take a few minutes (3–5) to list on paper all the roles you play in your life.

3. As you go around the group, ask each student to name one of the listed roles. Ask students to try not to repeat a role already mentioned. As students mention their roles, list them on the board or overhead projector. Ask occasional questions to get at more details, e.g., You're a musician. What instrument, if any, do you play? Brother... Are you an older brother or younger brother?
4. On the back of their paper, ask students to write a paragraph about what they might want or need in one of the listed roles. Instruct students to develop a problem (based on the want or need) and write about how this problem might begin, unfold, and end.
5. Following this activity, ask students, **How does the problem begin? Unfold? End?** Elicit examples from students.

Examples may include a babysitter needs help... because a child becomes ill, a dancer needs health...because he has broken his ankle, a student wants justice...because she is unfairly accused of cheating, a son wants his family to stay together...but his parents decide to separate...

6. Ask several students to read aloud their paragraphs. Read or tell the following information.

These are the relationships you know about. They lead you to truths that you *know* and no one can take away from you. Look to these relationships as *one* source for material to dramatize.

7. Distribute and direct students to read WRITING GUIDELINES. Discuss these guidelines with your students. In particular, be sure students are aware of the following:
 - Create fictional characters. If using a real person or event as inspiration, change several distinguishing features.



You can often gain insightful information into your students' lives through this exercise. The author recalls a quiet student answering that he was a younger brother, but because his older brother was retarded, the student behaved like an older brother.



It is important to maintain an environment in which students feel safe taking risks. The Writing Guidelines will be helpful in this regard.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 2

STAGE WRITE

Planning What Happens



15 minutes to begin in class,
finish independently



- Dramatize stories without using physical violence, weapons, or death on stage. Instead, show the audience what leads to, or results from, violent actions.
- Refrain from asking others if an incident is autobiographical. Writers draw on experience, observation, and imagination. The mix is an individual matter.

8. Read or tell the following information.

One way to plan a scene or play is to start with the main character. We will use a Play Idea Chart to help us organize the development of a scene or play.

9. Direct students to the Play Idea Chart on their PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY (distributed during Lesson 1). Using a board or overhead projector, copy the following information.

Play Idea Chart

1. Character	2. Wants or needs	3. From	4. Obstacle	5. Action	6. Result

Using the Play Idea Chart as a guide, read or tell the following information.

Let's work through this chart. The "want" must be something that can't be held in the hand or touched. (*This is another way of saying the "want" must be an abstract quality.*) Examples include love, trust, a job, privacy, independence, information, etc.

Let's start with a fantasy character. (*Numbers refer to columns on the chart*)

1. Juan, a young spider 2. wants to learn to spin 3. from the Spider Guru 4. He must first convince the guru he is ready, by passing a test 5. takes test 6. passes!

Now, let's take a light comedy:

1. Millie, a shy bank teller 2. wants to get to know a male customer who comes in often 3. To spiff up her appearance, she goes to a hairdresser 4. who does a terrible job 5. Millie rushes to a wig store 6. where the salesman turns out to be the bank customer, who admits that he always wears a wig

How about a drama, with a character closer to home:

1. Joe, age 15 2. wants trust 3. from his father 4. Joe's behavior: his father knows that Joe stole money from the father's wallet 5. Joe washes cars 6. and pays his father back with interest

10. Instruct students to use the chart to brainstorm ideas for the play or scenes they will write. Have students work through the chart for **three** different main characters. Instruct students to use **WRITING GUIDELINES** for this activity. Go over the following information with students to ensure understanding.
 - Each character must be someone they can know well and care about. "Know well" means understand, imagine in detail, write from the character's point of view.
 - If they use real life characters or situations, transform them in some way to make them fictional; e.g., change the age, or gender, or occupation.
 - Avoid character names that belong to classmates.
 - Avoid characters from movies or books; someone else has already done the creative work.
11. Following this activity, ask students to decide which of their main characters and story line they will develop into a play or a scene. Instruct students to chart this idea on a clean piece of paper to hand in (again, using the organization of the Play Idea Chart).
12. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 3

STAGE WRITE



Estimated activity time
45–60 minutes

Warm Up
Objective: Listening,
Thinking quickly
on your feet



10 minutes



This exercise can be made more difficult by eliminating students if they do the incorrect movement or hesitate too long.

Introduction to
Improvisation



20 minutes

LESSON 3: PLAYWRITING ON YOUR FEET

Objectives

- Introduce improvisation; whys and hows of improvisation
- Practice improvisation with dialogue and action
- Link improvisation with writing

Procedure

1. Collect students' Play Idea Charts (with their play ideas) from Lesson 2.

2. **Elephant/Airplane/Bippity, Boppity, Boo warm up**

The goal of this exercise is to respond to aural and visual cues by assuming a set position.

The class stands in a circle with the teacher in the middle. The teacher points to one student and says, "Elephant." The student immediately sticks one arm straight out to be a trunk, while the adjacent two students become ears. The student on the right makes his/her right arm into an ear by lifting it up and bending it so the hand touches his/her head. The student on the left does the same with his/her left arm.

Then the teacher points to another student and says, "Airplane." The selected student uses his/her hands to make goggles on his/her eyes, while the adjacent students become wings. The student on the right extends his/her right arm straight out; the student on the left extends his/her left arm.

Finally, the teacher points to another student in the circle and says, "Bippity Boppity Boo." The challenge for this student is to say "boo" before the teacher does.

Now the teacher points to students in any order and calls out any one of the commands: Elephant, Airplane, or Bippity, Boppity, Boo. Once students are able to respond with the correct movements or words, speed up the exercise.

3. Discuss the following concepts with your students. Use the information provided to guide your discussion.

Why we use improvisation Explain that "to improvise" means "to make up on the spur of the moment." People improvise with the elements of drama, music, dance, and in other areas, such as cooking.



Read or tell the following information.

In this unit, we are going to improvise with dialogue and action. Think of improvisation as “playwriting on your feet.” It is a tool used by actors and writers to spark ideas and try out possibilities.

Improvs won’t have neat beginnings, middles, and ends. *I can call “scene” and end an improv at any time.*

Direct students to look at The Basic Rules of Improvisation on their PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY (distributed in Lesson 1) as you go over the following information.

The basic rules of improvisation

- Stay in character
If a student falls out of character, the partner can react in character (Young lady, what’s funny about what I just said?) or the teacher can freeze (stop) the action. Being silly comes from lack of concentration. Promote concentration by asking “process” questions such as, “why did your character say that?”
- Accept the facts. If the parent says the mouse cage is open, the teenager doesn’t say, “What mouse cage? I don’t have one.”
- Answer questions. A character must answer questions with information, not brush them off with responses like, “Because.”
- Build on what your partner gives you.
- Watch, listen, ask questions of your partner.

4. Ask for a student volunteer to improvise with you (or select a student). Tell the class that you will be improvising a scene between a teenager and a parent. The student will be the teen and you will be the parent. Ask the student to choose a name and specific age for his/her character. Choose a fictional first name and age for the parent.

Explain that the scene takes place in the teen’s bedroom, where the teen is doing something and does not want to be disturbed. Let the student pull up a chair or otherwise arrange the bedroom space.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 3

STAGE WRITE

Explain that you, as the parent, will start the improvisation when you see that the teen is engrossed in the action (e.g., talking on the phone, or reading, or painting toe nails).

Note to teacher about this improvisation

The parent is going to introduce conflict by asking the teen to clean up his/her messy room. As parent, push for what you want as hard as the teenager pushes for independence or privacy. Be persistent, but delay (or avoid) growing angry or punitive, because this show of power will probably end the scene.

Before you begin, have a reason in mind why the teen must clean his/her room *now*. Perhaps a realtor is coming to look at the house, or your mother is coming to visit and you want the house tidy, or painters arrive tomorrow.

From outside of the room, knock on the bedroom door. Getting in may take awhile (that's good). Use tactics that fit your character (not force). Don't say you want the room cleaned, just work on being admitted.

Enter the room, being careful not to step on books, piles of clothes, fruit peels...whatever you imagine covers the floor. Let the teen know what you want, but not why. Speak and move in character, e.g., "Guess why I'm here" (looking at a pile of stuff on the floor), or "How can you live in a room like this?" These are good opening lines because they require responses. Wait for a response (or push harder by saying "Answer me, please") and then build on whatever your partner gives you.

Push for what you want by asking questions about specific evidences of messiness:

- "Are those clothes clean or dirty?"
- "What's in that pile?"
- "Where is your pet mouse?" "Why is the cage door open?" "How long has it been since you've seen him?"

If the teen doesn't ask why the room needs to be cleaned now, introduce your reason.

- "Look, I need you to work with me because..."
- "Tomorrow won't do. The woman selling the house for us will be here in two hours."

During the scene, be alert for information from the teen that may cause you to change course temporarily, such as the teen confessing that he is miserable, or being bullied, or has been dumped by a girl. Respond in character. The parent might use the time to comfort the teen, or elicit further information, or refocus the teen on cleaning the room. Make choices that give your partner room to create dialogue and action.

End the scene after a few minutes, or when you feel the energy waning. The teen can win:

PARENT

(Exiting) I give up. Live in chaos! *or*,

(Exiting) Okay, I'll leave. But you haven't heard the end of this! or negotiate with you:

PARENT

Okay, shove the clothes under the bed for now, but tomorrow... *or*
If *you* try to have the room cleaned by the weekend, *I'll* try to keep your grandmother downstairs... *or*
I do understand how you feel. The room can wait.

5. Ask the class what each character wanted in the scene. There are no "right" answers. Responses for the parent might be obedience, to take care of the child, respect, to sell the house, to please the grandmother. Responses for the teen might be to be allowed to grow up, to be respected, to be given independence, to have privacy, to get the parent off his/her turf.

Mention the setting, because it contributes to the conflict. Cleaning the living room or garage (rooms used by all members of the family) would not evoke the same response in the teen.

6. The Shoe Store Improvisation

Tell the students that they are going to do an improvisation now, in 2s, with everyone working at once. The only person watching will be you, and you will be moving around getting good ideas. Tell them you will set up the situation step by step, and then give them plenty of time to talk. Right now, they need to listen.

Instruct students to choose a partner with whom they can *work*, not *giggle*. Have partners stand next to each other and decide who is **A** and who is **B**.



These are examples of ending the improvisation.

Improvisation in 2s



15–20 minutes



*Before proceeding, ask **As** to raise hands, then **Bs**, to be sure students are ready to go on.*

The beauty of students working in 2s, all at the same time, is that no one waits for a turn. The payoff is in doing the improvisation with your partner. Quick verbal feedback from students may be enough to wrap up the exercise. Watching several pairs repeat their scenes may be useful and fun, but not always necessary.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 3

STAGE WRITE



Student partners



An alternative improv situation is provided for older or more mature students in **Procedure #10**.



Read or tell the following information.

The setting is a shoe store. It's 5 pm on a Friday. **A** is the customer, **B** the salesperson. **A** comes into the store to buy a pair of shoes for a special occasion that night. (*Brainstorm special occasions with the group, e.g., a sports event, an award dinner, an important date, the prom, a family party, a dance competition.*)

You and your partner will decide together what the special occasion is. You will find a place in the room where you can set up two chairs; they will be the store. You will mime everything else you need (e.g., when **B** carries in a stack of shoe boxes—*demonstrate this*).

Before you start, I need to talk to all the customers (**As**).

Gather the **As** close to you, out of earshot of the **Bs**. Tell the customers to:

- Take time choosing just the right shoes. Be as fussy as necessary; try on several pairs. Make it clear that this occasion matters a lot to you.
- When you start to pay for the shoes, you will discover that you have left behind every means of payment. You have no cash, credit cards, or checks. But you need the shoes tonight!
- Your job is to persuade the salesperson to let you take the shoes. You may not use force or steal the shoes. Instead, use logic, emotions, humor... whatever tactics fit your character. Come up with at least three strong, different reasons why the salesperson should let you walk out with the shoes.
- Keep these instructions secret from your partner.

Send them back to their partners.

Now I need to speak to the salespeople (**Bs**).

Gather them out of earshot of their partners. Tell the salespeople:

- You've had a bad week at work. You haven't sold enough shoes, and you need this sale.
- You're a hard worker, but the boss is beginning to doubt your abilities. You need this job.
- The store closes in one hour.
- Let this information influence your choices, and perhaps come out in the scene. Think about how old you are, why this job matters so much, and other things about your character. Each salesperson will be different.
- Keep these instructions secret from your partner.

Send them back to their partners.

Now, plan for several minutes with your partner. Find a place in the room where you can work. Decide together why A needs shoes (what's the occasion?). Then pause, get into character, and improvise the scene. Your job is to develop the conflict and relationship in the scene as you work together.

You may not have time to finish the scene. If you do, and others are still working, try the scene another way, or sit down and listen to other pairs. Questions? (Once questions are answered)...
Get to work.

Most students will dive in without your help, leaving you free to assist where you are needed. If planning takes more than 5 minutes, remind the group to move on to the actual improvisation. Let them improvise as long as you see productive work.

7. Bring students back to their seats. Elicit feedback in a brief discussion, with questions such as:
 - Did you get involved in the situation? Was it easy to think of dialogue?
 - What was your special occasion?
 - Did any customer leave the store with new shoes? What tactic did you use?



Hearing the range of choices is usually fun.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 3

STAGE WRITE



Students may volunteer themselves; don't let them call out others' names or pressure peers to volunteer.

Once students see that you won't embarrass them, or let their peers do so, they will volunteer eagerly.

8. Ask for volunteers or choose one or two improves to see. Explain that we learn from watching one another's work. The recreated scene will be somewhat different, since it's an improvisation, but that's fine.

If no one volunteers, choose a pair whom you observed, telling the students you are choosing them because you know the scene had energy.

9. Instruct students to place handouts in their folders.
Teaching Note Prior to teaching Lesson 4, review the Play Idea Charts you collected today. Below are some suggested comments to assist in the process of evaluating student play ideas.

Evaluation Suggestions

- Okay to start writing
- Okay, with these changes
- Let's see another idea

Requested changes might include:

- Omit the narrator; use your characters to show the story
- Too many characters (4 maximum, 2-3 better)
- Too many different times and locations
- Avoid violence

Reasons for another idea might be:

- The "want" (or objective) isn't important enough (e.g., Eli wants a ride in Hal's new car).
- The "want" is concrete (e.g., Jen wants Rita's boyfriend, rather than she wants love, or a relationship with a boy).
- The action is violent, find another tactic the character can use.
- The main character is too evil or violent.
- What do you like or admire about the main character?
Can you know him well and care about him?
- You think student has chosen a situation about which (s)he knows nothing (e.g., To create a prison inmate you may have to do lots of research. Do you have resources? Is there another way your character might be restricted or limited?)

10. **Optional** Alternative Situation to The Shoe Store Improvisation
After students divide into pairs of **A** and **B**, explain that:
A is age 13 or older. **B** is at least 2 years older than **A**. *To be sure students understand, ask*
- Can **A** be 15? (*sure*) Then **B** must be at least 17.
 - Can **A** be 75? (*sure*) Then **B** is at least 77.

Read or tell the following information.

In this improvisation, **A** is coming to ask **B** for something **B** has the power to grant. It must be something that cannot be held in the hand or touched.

Brainstorm examples of what **A** might want (e.g., information, comfort, love, advice, protection, a job). Develop one or two of these ideas to show students how to plan the improvisation. For example: **A**, age 13, goes to **B**, his older brother of 24, because **A** wants to live with **B**.

After I stop talking, work with your partner to plan who your characters are, where they are, and what **A** wants or needs. Plan for 2–3 minutes, then get into character and improvise the scene. Plan the beginning only; let the rest happen. You will all be working at once, with nobody but me watching, so concentrate on your partner and your scene only. Ignore me as I walk around.

But first, let me talk to the **As** only.

Gather them in one corner, so **Bs** can't overhear. Tell the **As** to:

- Ask for something your character really wants or needs. Make it important to your character.
- Before you start, think of three strong and different reasons why **B** should say yes. Use the reasons, one by one, as the scene unfolds.
- Use whatever tactics fit your character (e.g., logic, emotion, humor. Work hard to get what you want).
- Don't tell your partner what I've just said.

Alternative Improv Situation



20–30 minutes



This is an alternative to the Shoe Store Improv situation provided in Procedure #6. Use one or the other, not both.

This improvisation requires more abstract thinking and stronger collaborative skills than Shoe Store. It has the additional benefit of tapping directly into material of importance to individual students, and reveals the individuality among them.



DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 3

STAGE WRITE



As return to partners.

Now, let me talk to the **Bs**.

Again, in corner. Tell the **Bs** to:

- You have the power in this scene. You may grant the request or not, that's up to your character.
- Before you grant the request, or negotiate, you must give three strong and different reasons for saying no. Think of these before you start, and use the reasons, or others, as the scene unfolds. Choose reasons that fit your character.
- Don't tell your partner what I've just said.

Bs return to their partners.

Do not worry about finishing the scene; focus on developing the conflict and relationship as you work together. If you finish before others, try the scene another way, or sit down and listen to other pairs. Questions?

When I stop talking, find a place where you and your partner can work. Decide on your ages, relationship, location, and what **A** wants or needs. Then pause, get into character, and **DO** the scene. Get to work.

Circulate as students work, giving help as needed. If a pair seems bored, or can't decide on an idea, or is too wild, ask questions such as:

- What decisions have you made?
- What does **A** want or need?

Be sure the "want" can't be held in the hand or touched. **A** common first choice is money or car keys, however these are concrete. Ask why **A** needs the money or key. This will lead **A** to an abstract, and more dramatic objective (e.g., to impress a boy, to run away from home, to buy a gift, to pay a debt).

When you notice energy waning, tell each pair, quietly, to wrap up the exercise. If a pair is deeply involved, as often happens, give them longer.



Students may volunteer themselves only, not put friends in the hot seat.

Once students see that you won't embarrass them, or let their peers do so, they'll volunteer eagerly.

S T A G E W R I T E

Once students have returned to their seats, ask each group to briefly discuss the situation they improvised. Then ask for volunteers to show the group their scenes. Explain that we learn from watching one another's work. The scene will be somewhat different, since it's an improvisation, but that's fine.

If no one volunteers, choose a pair whom you observed, telling the students you are choosing them because you know the scene had energy.

See one or two scenes. Pose different questions after each improvisation, focusing on the strength of the scene

- What do you know about that character?
- How did the setting influence the conflict?
- Was the "want" (objective) important?

If time permits, let each pair describe the situation it improvised (characters, relationship, setting, what **A** wanted, outcome). Use this opportunity to mention the virtue of individuality and the creativity within the group.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 4

STAGE WRITE



45–60 minutes

Warm Up Objective: Observation



10 minutes



Once a student makes a change in his/her appearance, it remains for the entire exercise (e.g., each change must be completely new).

LESSON 4: WRITING DIALOGUE AND ACTION

Objectives

- Understand that dialogue is the primary tool of the playwright
- Practice using dialogue in improvisation
- Write dialogue and action in proper playwriting format

Materials

- WHAT IS A SCENE? — *class set*
- Sample Scene (chosen by teacher) — *class set*
- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Procedure

1. Changes warm up

The goal of this exercise is for each student to correctly guess his/her partner's changes in appearance.

Students form two lines, facing one another, with space between people. Each partner observes the other front and back, without talking for 30 seconds, paying careful attention to details. On cue from the teacher, the rows turn their backs to one another while each person makes three subtle but visible changes in his/her appearance (e.g., clothing, hair, jewelry, shoes). Again on cue, partners face one another. Each tries to identify the changes made by his/her partner. If a student is stumped, his/her partner reveals the change.

Now the first person in one line walks to the end of the line, while others in that line move up to stand opposite new partners. The sequence is repeated, with each student making three additional changes. (This may require imagination and is usually fun.) If time, repeat sequence a third time.

Have students stand in two parallel lines and begin the warm up exercise.

2. Ask students to sit with a partner. Explain that *dialogue (the words characters say) is the primary tool of the playwright*. Dialogue lets us show (not tell) the story. Through dialogue we learn about characters and watch the plot unfold.

Model the exercise (2 students in front of the class).

Set up an **A/B** situation, like the one below, giving each character a job or profession; a habitual way of doing something; and the memory of a frightening event he or she has experienced.

A, Martha is a dentist who hiccoughs. As a child, she was scared to pieces by the dog next door.

B, Frank is a plumber who always peels an apple before eating it. Last week he almost drowned while surfing.

Setting Skip over the obvious, in this instance a dentist's office or kitchen, and choose an environment that offers more challenge (e.g., a gym, airport, or police station).

Ask two students to improvise the scene in front of the class. Their task is to reveal the above information through dialogue and action. They must weave the information seamlessly into the interaction.

Give the actors a moment to decide on the relationship between **A** and **B**, and why each is at the chosen setting, e.g., in the police station, **A** and **B** are strangers. **A**'s purse has been stolen, **B** is waiting for a friend to get off work.

Let students respond briefly to the improv; it will probably be funny and imaginative.

3. Develop two *new* characters with the entire class; select a new setting.

A is a _____ who has a habit of _____. **A** remembers when _____.

B is a _____ who has a habit of _____. **B** remembers when _____.

Each pair improvises the scene, with everyone working at once.

Improvisation with dialogue



20 minutes



Student Partners

Improvise in 2s



You may write the following information on an overhead or board to assist in student understanding.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 4

STAGE WRITE

Writing Dialogue and Action



25 minutes



The format presented is preferred by professional playwrights and actors, because each character name and speech stands out. To save space, textbooks often list the speaker's name at the extreme left, followed by a colon.

It is recommended that students refer to their Sample Scene for further guidance in playwriting format.

4. Circulate as the pairs work, giving help as needed. If time permits, ask one or two pairs to show their scenes.
5. Distribute a Sample Scene (chosen by you for the purposes of providing students with a model; from Sample Scenes), as a format model. Read aloud and discuss briefly. Distribute and discuss WHAT IS A SCENE? Remind students to keep these for reference.
6. Sam/Chris Scene
Explain that students will learn playwriting format by copying the set-up and first lines of a situation you will provide. After discussing possible directions the situation might take, each student will expand it into a scene of at least one page.

Refer students to Playwriting Format: Writing the Scene on their PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY (distributed in Lesson 1). Ask students to copy what you write on the board or overhead projector. Talk through the steps as you write them.

Title

(May be chosen after scene is completed)

At left margin, list each character, with a brief descriptive phrase:

**Characters: CHRIS, parent of SAM
SAM, age 13**

What do you notice about these names? Yes, they're gender neutral. The parent can be a mother or father, the teen a son or daughter. Your choice.

Setting: indicates time and place

Setting: A waiting area outside an office, 10 am

At rise: what the audience sees when the play starts, or the "curtain rises"

At rise: SAM and CHRIS sit in chairs next to each other.

Skip a line. Put the name of the character who speaks in capital letters in the center of the page. Write dialogue without quotation marks. Put stage directions in parentheses.

SAM

(Mumbling) I wish we weren't here.
Skip a line after each speech.

CHRIS

(Looking for a piece of paper) Where is it? I know I brought it.

Lead the class in brainstorming what *might* be happening. Where are the characters? Why are they waiting? What's on the paper? Briefly develop several possible situations.

7. Instruct students to write individually, continuing the Sam/Chris scene, writing at least 1 page. Remind them to:
 - First, decide on the genders of the characters.
 - Decide where the characters are, and then reveal this through dialogue.
 - Let us discover what the main character wants or needs.
 - Bring in a third character only if necessary.
8. While students write, circulate to give encouragement and corrections *in format*. Remind students to look at the sample scene you have distributed for guidance.
9. Use this time to return students' Play Idea Charts with their play ideas and answer questions they may have about your comments.
10. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress (e.g., Sam/Chris scene) home to complete.



In following preferred playwriting format, students should write their scripts on only one side of the page. This increases the script's readability.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 5—PLAY

STAGE WRITE



40 minutes

Warm Up

Objective: Group trust



10 minutes



This exercise is much more effective if all the students are absolutely silent (outside of saying “wall”).

LESSON 5: CREATING YOUR MAIN CHARACTER—Play

Objectives

- Discuss and begin creating a main character
- Visualize main character
- Write first draft of Scene One

Materials

- GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE — *class set*
- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Procedure

1. Collect students’ Sam/Chris scenes from Lesson 4. Ask students if they found the assignment challenging? Fun? Discuss their reactions and impressions.

2. **Trust Circle warm up**

The goal of this exercise is for the leader, whose eyes are closed, to tag a student by moving quickly and listening.

The class stands in a circle. The teacher gives each student a number from 1–6. The teacher calls all the 1s into the middle of the circle and chooses one of the 1s as the leader. All of the 1s move around within the circle, staying clear of the leader. With eyes closed, the leader also moves within the circle, trying to touch another 1.

The students remaining in the circle form the wall. They put their hands in front of their bodies, palms facing toward the circle.

When the leader approaches the encircling “wall,” hands gently push the leader back into the circle. The students pushing may also say, “Wall.”

When the leader tags a student in the middle of the circle, group 1 rejoins the circle and group 2 repeats the sequence.

The exercise is over when each number has gone into the middle of the circle.

Call the number 1s to the middle of the circle and begin the exercise.

3. Distribute GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE. Read or tell the following information.

Plays are built around characters. Most important of all is your main character. Although you will all use the same basic structure to plan your plays, each will be different because your main characters will be unique characters you create.

Your main character is on a journey, figuratively speaking. Each part of the journey is a scene. A scene takes place at one time and in one place.

Talk through the GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE using the following read or tell information.

Creating Your Main Character

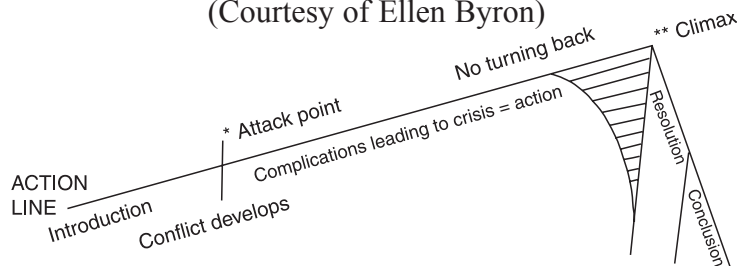


30 minutes



GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

(Courtesy of Ellen Byron)



Introduction We meet characters, especially main one, and learn some background (exposition)

Major dramatic question What does character want or need?

Attack point Character has decided what (s)he wants and decides to go after it

Complications Every character introduced should complicate the story

Climax Whether character succeeds or not; no turning back from this point in the story

Every scene should follow this structure, though rules are meant to be stretched and sometimes broken.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 5—PLAY

STAGE WRITE



The action begins when we meet the characters, especially the main one, and learn background information, or exposition. The action in the first scene gets the ball rolling. This is the inciting incident that makes the main character discover what (s)he wants and decide to go after it (the attack point).

The conflict develops as the main character encounters obstacles in the journey to get what (s)he wants. Often the obstacles are created by other characters. This will be your scene two.

The climax occurs when the character takes action from which there is no turning back. We learn whether the main character succeeds or fails, and discover the results of the character's journey. This will be your scene three.

4. Read or tell.

Here is the structure we will use for a one-act play.

Using an overhead projector or board, write down the following information.

Sc.1 — Main character discovers (s)he wants or needs something, decides to go after it. The “want” or need should be something you can’t hold in your hand or touch.

This covers on the chart:

1.Character 2. Want 3. From 4. Obstacle

Sc.2 — Character takes action to get the want; tries to overcome obstacle(s). We watch the character struggle, and see the tactics used.

This covers on the chart:

5. Action

Sc.3 — Character succeeds or fails to get the want.

This covers on the chart:

6. Result

5. Instruct students to take out lined paper. Read or tell the following information.

We are going to do an exercise together to help you visualize your main character. Think about your play idea. This will help you create your main character.

Number 1 to 10 along the left margin of your paper. I am going to ask you to close your eyes and visualize your main character, or a character you might write about. Make sure the character is someone you can know well and care about. You “know” a character when you can imagine the world from his/her perspective.

Let this character take shape in your imagination. I will ask you to describe your character one item at a time. Listen to the questions the first time I go through them. Then open your eyes, listen again, and write down your choices.

Eyes closed, please.

Slowly, read the following list of questions once.

1. Is your character male or female?
2. Age? Be specific.
3. Ethnic background, if you see this clearly and it matters to you?
4. Hairstyle?
5. What is your character wearing on her/his feet? Be specific.
6. Anything particularly interesting about your character physically?
7. Your character is wearing something that was a gift. Describe it.
8. Your character is holding something in his/her hand. What is it?
9. Your character is experiencing a strong feeling. What is it?
10. Character’s name?

Ask students to open their eyes (no talking, please) and write their responses as you read the questions a second time.



DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 5—PLAY

STAGE WRITE



6. Read or tell the following information.

Now let yourself *hear* the character's voice. Write a short monologue for your character.

A monologue is a long speech, often about a certain incident. Think about the 10 choices you have made, and let the monologue come from these. Your character may be addressing another character, or the audience, or thinking aloud, or talking to an object. What's on your character's mind?

7. When students have finished their monologues, listen to several lists and monologues.

8. Read or tell the following information.

Think about your character and your Play Idea Chart. Write the first draft of the first scene in your play. This is the inciting incident, the event that starts the snowball rolling.

Show us what makes your character decide to go after something. Be sure your character's "want" is important.

Direct students to Playwriting Format: Writing the Scene which is on their PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY (distributed in Lesson 1) and continue to read or tell.

Use playwriting format. Begin with title (if you know it at this point), characters, setting, at rise. Keep the action in one place, at one time. There is a maximum of four characters in the entire play. Type if possible; revising will be so much easier than if you write by hand. Minimum: 3 pages

9. Work with individual students. Answer questions about the comments you wrote on their Play Idea Charts. Make sure they are using the correct format. Help with ideas.
10. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
11. **Teaching Note** Students need to have their Scene One completed by Lesson 6.

LESSON 6: BUILDING CONFLICT—Play

Objectives

- Discuss and practice appropriate evaluation and feedback of other's work
- Identify and use effective conflict in improvisations
- Write Scene Two

Materials

- FEEDBACK — *class set*
- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Procedure

1. Read or tell the following information.

We read aloud scripts in progress to enjoy one another's ideas, to let the writer hear dialogue outside his/her head, to learn from our accomplishments, and to give one another help. Dialogue is meant to be heard!

2. Select one or two Scene Ones (from Lesson 5) by asking:
 - Who worked hard and would like to have his/her scene read?
 - Who had trouble and would like our (teacher's and class') help?
 - Who would like to hear the dialogue outside of your head?

3. Have playwrights quickly describe their characters and choose classmates to read roles. Actors rehearse in a corner, or outside the classroom, during the warm up. They pull the writer out of the warm up if they have questions.

4. **Tiger, Traps, People warm up**

The goal of this exercise is for one team to win three points. Points are acquired through luck and a bit of strategy.

Divide the class in half, with teams standing on either side of the room. This exercise is similar to the children's game "Rock, Paper, Scissors," which students may remember. Here the teams will choose to be Tigers, Traps, or People.

Explain that **Tigers** put their hands out in front of them like tiger paws and roar. They eat people. **People** put their arms down at their sides. They set traps. **Traps** put their arms directly out in front of them and clap their hands together like a trap. They catch tigers.



45–60 minutes



Warm Up

Objective: Teamwork



10 minutes

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 6—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

Selected Scenes



15 minutes



*The theatrical term for moment is “beat,” meaning a short time when the focus is on a particular issue or part of the conflict.

Each group huddles for 15 seconds to decide what to be. On cue, the groups face each other in the stance of Tigers, People, or Traps. The stronger group wins a point. If groups choose the same stance, neither wins.

The relative strengths are:

- Tigers eat People (Tigers win the point)
- People set Traps (People win)
- Traps capture Tigers (Traps win)

When one group acquires three points, the warm up is over.

5. Have students (including student actors) return to their seats. Distribute FEEDBACK and discuss the appropriate ways to provide feedback. *Note: Be sure to review **Unit Elements #4, Giving and Eliciting Feedback** before leading this exercise.*
6. Have student actors read the scenes. Actors begin by reading aloud any relevant information including the title, author, characters, setting, and what is seen “at rise.” To help the audience imagine the physical world of the play, actors read aloud only important stage directions. These include exits, entrances, and major actions (she hides behind the door, he puts his arms around her). When possible, actors follow (but don’t read aloud) directions for line readings. After each reading use the following information to discuss the scene.
 - What kept you listening?
 - This worked for me... (Be specific: A character’s reaction, a certain relationship, a tactic, a line of dialogue...)
 - Who else noticed something that worked?

The above questions focus on the *strengths* in the writing. If you feel comfortable offering a suggestion for improvement, do so; however it is too early to *solicit* suggestions from the class.

Your suggestions might be:

- Conflict: I don’t hear much conflict. Am I missing something? Remember, conflict must start to build in Scene 1.
- Use dialogue and action to *show* us the story. Remember, the audience won’t see the stage directions, such as, “She has just failed a test.” How will you reveal this information to the audience?
- Creating multi-dimensional characters: Is the brother *always* angry? Try to make him a three-dimensional character by showing us other sides of him.
- Developing ideas: I was confused by A saying such-and-such... Perhaps you need to expand that moment*, or reveal more about A’s history earlier in the scene.

7. Collect scenes from students.

8. Read or tell the following information.

Conflict is the heart of drama. We learn about characters, and identify with them, by watching them struggle to get something they want or need.

9. Improvisation One, or What Not to Do

Ask for or select two student volunteers to come to the front of the room to perform an improv.

The set up:

- **A** is a ninth grader, **B** is a math teacher. **A** has come to **B**'s classroom after school.

Whisper to A, so that no one can hear: "You want to borrow **B**'s purple pen."

Whisper to B, so that no one can hear: "Find at least two reasons to say no before saying yes, if you choose to say yes."

10. After the improvisation, which will be short and possibly silly, try a question such as:

- Did the scene hold your attention? Did you care about the characters? Want to know what happens next? (If response is yes) Would you watch a whole play about this?

Once you've agreed that the scene didn't work, lead students to recognize why:

- **A**'s "want" was trivial, unimportant.
- **A** needs to go after something that matters to **A** and to us.

Then we'll identify with **A**, root for **A** as the character struggles. Making the conflict more important is called "raising the stakes."

11. Improvisation Two: Raising the Stakes

How can we raise the stakes? What might **A** go after? Choose a suggestion from the class and repeat the improvisation, with other actors. Examples include:

- **A** wants respect, asks **B** not to call **A** stupid during class.
- **A** wants fairness. Had bad headache during recent important test, wants to take it again, or do extra credit.
- **A** wants guidance. Shows **B** an inventive way of solving a problem. **B** is threatened by **A**'s knowledge, scorns it.

Building Conflict



20 minutes



DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 6—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

B must still find two reasons to say no, whatever the situation.

Watch and respond to this improvisation. Note that both **A** and **B** need to work harder to justify their choices. The tug of war between characters (conflict) is what keeps us engaged in drama.

12. Assignment

Refer students to their Play Idea Chart (the one they wrote on the ideas for their play; Lesson 2). Ask students: What did you put under “action?” Do you still want to go with the tactics you chose, or do you have better ideas for Scene Two?

Instruct students that in a moment they will write the first draft of Scene Two.

In Scene Two, the main character takes action to get what (s)he wants; tries to overcome obstacles.

Four characters or fewer in the entire play.

Use one setting and time per scene.

Setting the action of all three scenes in one place and time is ideal, but difficult for beginning writers to handle. Moreover, to some minds, unity of time and place is old fashioned.

13. To help students get started, write the following on an overhead projector or board.

Scene Two

Characters: List the names of characters we’ve met in Scene One; list and describe any new characters (if writing a play)

Setting:

At rise:

Read or tell the following information.

As you write your two connected scenes, we should learn a lot about your characters by the choices they make in Scene Two. Your characters should become increasingly individual. For example, you are not creating a “typical teenager;” you are creating a distinct individual who has a specific age, way of speaking, background, dream, and so forth.

14. Decide when Scene Two is due and inform your students. Instruct students to write three pages minimum; write as much as they need to write.
15. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
16. **Teaching Note** Students need to have their Scene Two completed by Lesson 7. Prior to teaching Lesson 7, review and comment briefly on work collected today (Scene One). For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.

From this point on, vary the pace to meet the needs of your group. *Consider asking students to rewrite Scene One if the work heard in class did not have:*

- Conflict
- Relationships that seem to be of importance to the writer
- Characters with admirable or likable qualities
- A main character with a “want” worth pursuing

Remind students that characters they create are characters they *control*. In life, adolescents rarely get to call the shots. As playwrights, they are in charge. This is an opportunity to *write candidly about issues that confuse or anger them*. Encourage students to dig in.



In following preferred playwriting format, students should write their scripts on only one side of the page. This increases the script's readability.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 7—PLAY

STAGE WRITE



50+ minutes

LESSON 7: TROUBLE SHOOTING—Play

Objectives

- Learn to provide constructive feedback
- Use improvisation as tool for writer's block
- Develop characters
- Write Scene Three

Materials

- Tape (masking) — *one*

Classroom Setup

For the purposes of the warm up, clear a wide area of space in the classroom. Put a line of masking tape on the floor across one end of the room (see **Procedure #3** for more information).

Procedure

1. Return Scene One to each student, with your comments. Ask students if they have any questions.
2. Select one to two Scene Twos (or revised Scene Ones), due today, to hear aloud. To solicit volunteers, ask the following questions.
 - Anyone need ideas?
 - Have questions about what you've written?

Writers describe characters, select actors; actors rehearse elsewhere while class does warm up.

3. Cross the Line warm up

Prior to beginning this warm up, clear a wide area of space in the classroom and put a line of masking tape on the floor across one end of the room. The goal of this exercise is to cross the line of tape without being seen by the leader.

One student (the leader) stands behind the tape. Five students line up at the opposite end of the room, facing the line. The leader turns his/her back to the group. The five students start moving (walking, jumping, crawling) towards the line of tape. The leader turns around periodically to face the group.

The students freeze as soon as they see the leader begin to turn. If one student is still in motion when the leader turns around, the student goes to where (s)he started. The first person to cross the line of tape while the leader's back is turned is the new leader.



Inform students that this is a good way to get feedback.

Warm Up

**Objective: Concentration,
Focus**



10 minutes

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 7—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

Five new people go to the starting place and the exercise is repeated.

4. Have students return to their seats. Have student actors read the scenes. If actors are reading Scene Two, and the class has not heard Scene One, the writer should summarize the action in Scene One before actors begin. Actors begin by reading aloud any relevant information including the title, author, characters, setting, and what is seen “at rise.” To help the audience imagine the physical world of the play, actors read aloud only important stage directions. These include exits, entrances, and major actions (she hides behind the door, he puts his arms around her). When possible, actors follow (but don’t read aloud) directions for line readings.

After a general question (What worked? Held your attention?), focus on the purpose of Scene Two with questions such as:

- Does the main character *take action*?
- What does (s)he do?

Note the difference between taking action (**A** tells the teacher that **B** has cheated) and being the passive recipient of another’s action (**A** learns that **B** is circulating a rumor that **A** has cheated).

- Is **A**’s action in character?
- Does **A** work hard to achieve his want?
- Does tension build in the scene?
- Are we left wondering what will happen? (We should be left wondering, because Scene Two is not the conclusion)
- Do we care? (Ask this only when you know the answer is yes)
- What tactics are used?
- Do they surprise us (hold our attention), or are they predictable?

5. Improvisation Option

If a writer says “I hate what I’ve written” or “I’m stuck,” ideas from the class might be helpful. Through using improvisation, students might explore alternative dialogue, different tactics, what might happen next, what might have happened before.

Selected Scenes



15 minutes



Guide student feedback as needed.



You may ask students if they would like to have their scenes improvised. Educate students on the merits of doing the improv for this purpose.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 7—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

Character Profile and Interviews



20+ minutes



Discussion also yields ideas, which might be prefaced by “What if,” or “How about,” or “Have you considered?” Modeling by the teacher will lead students in this direction, and away from assuming ownership: “If it were *my* play, I would...”

6. Collect Scene Twos from class.
7. Read or tell the following information.

Now that you have begun to know your characters, this exercise will help you develop them in more depth.

As you know from thinking about yourself, actions emerge from *who* we are, inside and out. You are going to create a character profile for one of your characters. All of your choices may not be revealed in your play, but they will enable you to build a context and history for your characters.

Choose an important character in your play. On a piece of paper, answer these questions about your character.

- Where does **A** live?
- Describe the room **A** sleeps in. (Note the wording here; **A** may sleep in the living room on a couch)
- Who lives with **A**?
- What is **A**’s job?
- Who is an important and trusted person in **A**’s life?
- What is **A**’s greatest fear?
- What is **A**’s dream?

Ask students the following questions:

- Were these choices difficult to make?
- Did you discover new information about your character?
- Did the information surprise you? Hold onto it.

8. Read or tell the following information.

Now we are going to learn even more. One of you will come up and read us your character profile. Then you will become the character and answer questions from the class. This is another kind of improvising.



Choose or ask for a volunteer to come up and do this improvisation activity. You should model questions during the first interview. Most should be open-ended. Point out that you are building on what the character says. For example:

- Do you have siblings? (Yes) Are they older or younger? Does your sister ever tease you?
- Why do you want to be a disc jockey? Do you know any?
- Do you plan to go to college?
- Do you know why you are afraid of ...?
- When you were younger, did you ever take a trip? With whom? Where?
- You said you live with your mother. Does she work?

9. Do several more interviews, or let students interview one another's characters in 2s, all working at the same time. If they work in 2s, conclude by asking the group for examples of:
- One detail that you remember about the character you interviewed.
 - Something that surprised you about *your* character, now that your character is beginning to take on a life of his or her own.

10. **Assignment**

Instruct students to write Scene Three.

Remind students that in Scene Three we discover the result: whether or not the character achieved her want. The ending should emerge from the characters and their actions in Scene Two. The ending need not be happy or tidy, however it should be satisfying. It will be satisfying if your characters, especially the main character, have changed, or grown, as a result of the events in the play. Endings can be the end of one journey and the beginning of another.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 7—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

Have students visualize the audience as they leave the theatre.

Ask students:

- What do you want the audience to think about, or feel, after the play ends?

11. Decide when Scene Three is due and inform your students. Instruct students to write three pages minimum.

12. **Optional**

If students rewrote Scene One, have them write Scene Two (see **Teaching Note** in Lesson 6 for guidance).

13. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
14. **Teaching Note** Students need to complete Scene Three before Lesson 8. Prior to teaching Lesson 8, review and comment briefly on work collected today (Scene Two). For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.

LESSON 8: SETTING—Play

Objectives

- Learn why revisions are important
- Learn how to revise
- Begin revision process

Materials

- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Setup

Prior to beginning class, write out the dialogue from **Procedure # 6** on a transparency or the board. Be sure to write in large, clear letters, with no punctuation. Students will need to be able to read this dialogue from all areas of the classroom.

Procedure

1. Return Scene Two to each student, with your comments. Ask students if they have any questions.
2. Select two Scene Threes (or revised Scene Twos), due today, to hear aloud. To solicit volunteers, ask the following questions.
 - Anyone need ideas?
 - Have questions about what you've written?

Writers describe characters, select actors; actors rehearse elsewhere while class does warm up.

3. **Gotcha! warm up**

The goal of this exercise is to find the Gotcha before the Gotcha finds you.

Students close their eyes and put their heads down on their desks. The teacher or a designated leader walks around the classroom and taps one person on the back. The leader stands off to the side and says, "There is a Gotcha in the room." Students walk around the room, slowly and silently, observing other members of the class as they walk.

The student who was tapped, the Gotcha, walks among the others. When the Gotcha makes eye contact and winks at another person, that person continues walking for 5 seconds and then says, "Gotcha" in a loud voice and sits down. (S)He is silent for the rest of the round and cannot reveal the identity of the Gotcha to anyone.



55+ minutes



Remind students that it is a good way to get feedback.

Warm Up
Objective: Observation



10 minutes

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 8—PLAY

STAGE WRITE



A clever Gotcha should be able to take at least five people out.

Selected Scenes



15 minutes



Guide student feedback as needed.

Revision



30+ minutes



The Gotcha continues to make eye contact and wink. The remaining students attempt to figure out the identity of the Gotcha, who should be as sneaky as possible when sending winks. If a student who is still walking around sees the Gotcha winking at someone else, (s)he says, “The Gotcha is (student’s name).” If (s)he is correct, the round ends and a new one begins. If not, (s)he sits down for the rest of the round.

4. Have students return to their seats. Have student actors read the scenes. If actors are reading Scene Three, and the class has not heard Scenes One and Two, the writer should summarize the action in these scenes before actors begin. Actors begin by reading aloud any relevant information including the title, author, characters, setting, and what is seen “at rise.” To help the audience imagine the physical world of the play, actors read aloud only important stage directions. These include exits, entrances, and major actions (she hides behind the door, he puts his arms around her). When possible, actors follow (but don’t read aloud) directions for line readings.

Pose some of the following questions:

- Has the main character changed or grown as a result of the events in the play? Explain.
 - What does the audience feel, or think about, after the play ends? Writer, is this what you intended?
 - Was scene three predictable, or did it have surprises?
 - Did the ending emerge from the characters? Seem inevitable?
 - Did we care about the characters?
5. Read or tell the following information.

Now that you have completed the first draft of your play, the next step is revision. Playwriting is rewriting. That is why we hear and comment on works in progress.

Setting, or environment, is an important element to reconsider.

- Are your settings as few as possible?
- Does each setting help you show the story?
- Is the setting reflected in the dialogue and action?

Remember the messy room improvisation? How does setting raise the stakes? *The action occurs in the teenager’s room. This is “private territory.” Locating the action in a common area in the house (e.g., the garage or kitchen, would lessen the tension).*

Let's do an exercise to show the importance of setting (where and when) and subtext. Subtext describes thoughts underneath the text, thoughts not spoken out loud.

6. Neutral Scene — Part I

Ask students to read through the dialogue written on the transparency or board (see Setup).

Ask the class the following questions.

- Where are **A** and **B**?
- What are they doing?

Brainstorm a few possible contexts, examples include:

- One person cutting another's hair
- Fitting a wedding dress
- Building a wall
- Repairing a car
- Picking a lock

Ask for two volunteers to improv the dialogue using this set up:
A is getting a hair cut from **B** in a newly opened salon.

Neutral Scene

A: Oh

B: Oh

A: Is this right

B: I'm not sure

A: What about

B: (a long pause)

A: What are you doing

B: This is better

A: Oh

B: Oh

7. Following the improv have students work in pairs, with everyone working at once. Have each pair create a new context for the words.

- Where the characters are
- What each wants
- What action is occurring

Circulate while students improvise.

Ask one pair to repeat work for the group. Students remain in 2s.



In this exercise, students create everything but the dialogue. The dialogue is given; actors may add actions, gestures, inflections, silence, and sounds. They may not add words.



Student pairs

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 8—PLAY

STAGE WRITE



8. Neutral Scene — Part II

Read or tell the following information.

When the action occurs is also an important part of the environment you create. What might add tension to these ordinary events:

- Basketball practice *What makes this practice different? Worth showing on stage?*
 - The coach tells the team she is moving to another school
 - One player intentionally trips and hurts another
- Showing report card to parent
 - This card has the first D student has ever received, or the most A's
 - Actual card has been trashed; student hopes forged card will satisfy parent
- Thanksgiving dinner
 - This will be the first family gathering without Grandpa, who died recently
- First time family meets someone's fiancé

9. Tell student pairs that before they improvise the Neutral Scene (dialogue) again, using the same characters and situation, they need to decide with their partners *why* the action is happening *today*, rather than last week or two years ago. Why is this moment important? Tell students to create the subtext in their minds (what their character is thinking but not saying out loud) as they do the scene again. Students can add silence, stillness, and movement as needed, but no extra dialogue.

If students need suggestions, try these:

- Haircut
 - **A**, customer, is going to be on television that night
 - **A** is having first hair cut since undergoing cancer treatment, which made **A** temporarily bald
- Fitting wedding dress
 - **B**, salesperson, has just been dumped by boyfriend
 - **B** plans to quit at closing time because customers treat her rudely
- Building a wall
 - **A** and **B** work in a prison; yesterday inmates broke the wall during an escape attempt
 - **A** and **B** bought a puppy yesterday; the wall will keep the puppy away from fast-moving traffic

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 8—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

10. Instruct student pairs to plan for several minutes, get in character, and improvise the scene again.
11. After students improvise, ask if their scenes had more urgency the second time through. Optional: See and discuss one to two neutral scenes.

12. **Assignment**

Read or tell the following information.

Now we begin the last phase of this unit, revision. Think about today's work as you strengthen your play. Before you start to revise Scene One, consider these questions about your play:

Do you know *why* you have chosen certain moments to show us?

Do these interactions reveal information about your characters?

Does your Scene One have a strong inciting incident, something that compels the main character to take action?

Instruct students to revise Scene One. Inform students that this will be their final copy of Scene One and thus, it must be legible and in correct format. Remind students that Scene One needs a strong inciting incident, something that compels the main character to take action.

13. Decide when Scene One is due and inform your students.
14. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
15. **Teaching Note** Students need to complete Scene One (final draft) before Lesson 9. Prior to teaching Lesson 9, review and comment briefly on work collected today (Scene Three). For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.



Note the differences between Part I and Part II. Highlight with your students the importance of revision.



It is especially important that students follow preferred playwriting format, including writing their scripts on one side of each page, when completing the revision process.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 9—PLAY

STAGE WRITE



50+ minutes

Warm Up

**Objective: Observation,
Thinking and
Moving Quickly**



10 minutes



A student cannot move from one spot without first pointing at someone else and receiving a “Yes!”

LESSON 9: REVISION—Play

Objectives

- Continue the revision process
- Discuss and practice using rhythm in dialogue

Materials

- Watch or clock with a second hand — *one*
- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Setup

1. Read the example rhythm scene before teaching Lesson 9, **Procedure #7** (see **Student Examples**).
2. Write the word count for the rhythm scene on a transparency or the board ahead of class. Display this when appropriate (see **Procedure #8**).

Procedure

1. Collect Final Scene One and return Scene Three with comments.
2. **Yes! warm up**
The goal of this exercise is to always have a spot in the circle.

Students stand in a circle. One student (**A**) points to another student across the circle. As soon as **A** points to **B**, **B** says, “Yes!” (Students must say yes when pointed to.) **A** walks across the circle towards **B**’s spot. **B** must move before **A** gets there, but **B** may not move until **B** finds a new spot. Thus, **B** points to someone else in the circle, (**C**). **C** says, “Yes!” and **B** walks to **C**’s spot. By now, **A** has taken **B**’s spot and **B** has taken **C**’s spot. The round continues increasing in speed as students grow familiar with the process.

3. Inform students that they will be doing two exercises today to help them revise Scenes Two and Three.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 9—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

4. Explain that in this exercise, a character, **C**, has a difficult decision to make. One internal voice, **A**, tells the character to do an action; the other internal voice, **B**, says not to do it. After listening to arguments from both sides, **C** makes a decision.

5. Model the exercise

Ask or choose three students to come to the front of the room.

A and **B** stand on either side of **C**.

Use one of the situations below.

C is a large old family dog. **C** is alone in the kitchen. The fully cooked Thanksgiving turkey is on the table at **C**'s eye level. **C** is hungry. Should **C** eat the turkey? *This light-hearted example lets students learn the format before diving into controversial subjects.*

C has been called in to see the school counselor. **C** knows a friend has cheated on an important test (or is doing drugs). **C** thinks the counselor will ask about the test (or the drugs). Should **C** answer the counselor truthfully?

For any scenario chosen, **A**'s job is to persuade **C** to do it; **B** will argue not to do it.

A speaks, *uninterrupted*, for one minute. **B** does the same. Then **A** reiterates his/her strongest argument for 5 seconds; **B** does the same.

C thinks over the arguments and announces his/her decision. The class may also vote.

A and **B** should use logic, emotion, humor, history, as many different tactics as possible. Examples:

- **A** argues to eat the turkey because:
 - they'll think it was the other dog in the family
 - you don't like the dog food you're given
 - you're part of the family and should share in the celebration
 - you can impress the lady dog you like by bringing her a turkey leg
 - everyone should take risks now and then

Do It/Don't Do It



20+ minutes



This exercise is also called Angel/Devil, from the cartoon depiction of a person with an Angel on one shoulder and a Devil on the other. We prefer Do It/Don't Do It, because that title is non-judgmental.



Use the watch or clock with a second hand for the timing purpose.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 9—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

Rhythm Scene



20+ minutes



Teenagers love their music; they will give lots of examples.

- **B** argues not to eat the turkey because:
 - you might choke on the soft bones
 - you have to be a good example for the puppy in the family
 - you'll ruin their family dinner
 - they trust you
 - you have a reputation to maintain

6. Do It/Don't Do It using ideas from students' plays
Repeat the exercise with decisions suggested by students, from their plays.
- Think about your main character. Is (s)he facing a difficult choice? Set it up for us.
 - Having trouble creating the obstacles in Scene Two? Set up Do It/Don't Do It.

This exercise leads to lively discussions about what characters want, tactics they choose, risks they take, and consequences. It may also lead to students writing a long speech in which a character thinks out loud while deciding what to do (an internal monologue).

7. Read or tell the following information.
- You know from listening to music that fast and slow rhythms evoke different responses. What happens to you when you listen to fast music? Slow? House music (repetitive beat)? Rhythm is also important in dialogue. A character may:
- speak quickly or slowly
 - vary the pace depending on the situation
 - use few words, short statements
 - use complicated sentences
 - have speech habits (*Like...so I go, and he goes, and I go*)

Changes in rhythm keep us listening, as this exercise will show.

8. Instruct students to take out a piece of paper and number 1–50, along the left margin. Inform students that they are going to write (alone or in 2s) a scene with two characters. **A** speaks, then **B** speaks, and so on. The writer has only 50 lines in which to reveal the characters, the problem, and their efforts at resolution.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 9—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

Here's the challenge: Students must make every word count (pardon the pun), using only the word count below (write this on a transparency or the board):

Lines	1–20:	2 to 4 words per speech
Lines	21–30:	1 to 2 words
Lines	31–36:	1 word
Lines	37,38:	20 words or more
Lines	39–45:	4 to 6 words
Lines	46–50:	1 to 2 words

Model a scene verbally with one of the students, e.g.:

- | | | |
|------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1. Don't jump. | Or | 1. Great game. |
| 2. Why not? | | 2. You really liked it? |
| 3. Because I love you! | | 3. 'Course I did. |
| 4. Now you say it. | | 4. I'm embarrassed. |
| 5. Come in. Please. | | 5. How come? |
| 6. I'm desperate. | | 6. You didn't see? |

Have students write Rhythm Scenes, working as long as they are engaged. Everyone needn't complete all 50 lines.

9. Listen to several scenes. Have students look at how much they have communicated in very few words. Ask students what happens to them as a listener when the rhythms change, especially between line 36 and 37?
10. **Assignment**
Inform students that their assignment is to revise Scene Two. Use dialogue carefully, being aware of rhythms and specific word choices. Make every word work. Trim the excess.
11. Inform students of when Scene Two is due.
12. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
13. **Teaching Note** Students need to complete Scene Two (final draft) before Lesson 10. Prior to teaching Lesson 10, review and comment briefly on work collected today (final Scene One). For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.



Write these guidelines on the overhead for students to follow.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 10—PLAY

STAGE WRITE



50+ minutes

LESSON 10: FINISHING TOUCHES—Play

Objectives

- Continue revision process
- Choose title for play
- Prepare title page
- Prepare manuscript

Materials

- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Setup

Before class, write what to include on the title page and the next page (see **Procedure #6**) on a transparency.

Procedure

1. Return final Scene Ones with comments.
2. Select two revised Scene Twos to hear. Writers describe characters, select actors, and summarize earlier Scene One for them; actors rehearse elsewhere. Meanwhile, conduct the warm up with the remainder of the class.

3. **When I Dance warm up**

The goal of this exercise is to create a “dance” by remembering and performing all the moves of the previous players.

Students stand in a circle. Student **A** says, “When I dance, I dance like this.” **A** makes one movement with his/her body (e.g., kicks leg up, throws hands in air, turns around in a circle). **A** repeats the movement several times.

The student to **A**’s right, **B**, says, “When I dance, I dance like this.” **B** repeats **A**’s movement and adds one of his/her own. The student to **B**’s right, **C**, goes next and so forth.

The warm-up requires increasingly more concentration with each additional player.

After everyone has added a move, the teacher asks, “Who can do the whole dance on his/her own?” Individual students demonstrate the whole dance.

Warm Up

Objective: Memory



10 minutes



Encourage students to make bold or silly movement choices to add variety to the dance.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 10—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

- Have students return to their seats. Have student actors read the scenes. Actors begin by reading aloud any relevant information including the title, author, characters, setting, and what is seen “at rise.” To help the audience imagine the physical world of the play, actors read aloud only important stage directions. These include exits, entrances, and major actions (she hides behind the door, he puts his arms around her). When possible, actors follow (but don’t read aloud) directions for line readings.

Helpful questions to pose when reflecting on these scenes:

- What worked?
- Did the playwright build tension?
- Any surprises?
- Does each character have his/her own way of speaking?

- Collect final Scene Twos.
- Students need to choose a title. Inform students that the title should be memorable and catch attention, without giving away the plot. They may get ideas from a phrase of dialogue or the name of one of their characters.

Share the following with your students:

Selecting a title can be tough. One of the most romantic, well known play titles is *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In early drafts, Tennessee Williams called the play *The Poker Night*. What a difference!

Preparing the title page

Include the text below, arranged as shown in drawing in margin.

Title

A play by Author’s Name

Contact information: Person to contact (*agent/author*)

Address, phone, email

Copyright symbol (lower case “c” in a circle), date,
name of person holding copyright

For example:

THE BEST MISTAKE

A play by Great Writer

Contact: Great Writer

Address

Phone

email address

©2001 by Great Writer

Selected Scenes



25 minutes



Hearing and discussing scenes will take longer as the work becomes more developed, and as students grow more knowledgeable. Students enjoy hearing their own and others’ scenes. They learn from the discussion. Hear as many scenes as time permits.

Final Steps



15+ minutes



Include this information on the overhead for student reference.

Title
A play by _____

© _____

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 10—PLAY

STAGE WRITE

On the next page

Include:

- A list of all the characters in the play, with a brief description of each
- Brief information about the setting

Preparing the manuscript

Inform students of the following (or write on the transparency):

- Proofread carefully.
- Number the pages.
- Type the script (required by professional readers and contests) or use dark ink, so pages will photocopy clearly.
- Write on one side of paper only.
- Use a clip to hold pages together; do not staple.



Work backwards from the Performance date when determining the due date for final drafts from students. Actors may want script copies well before the Performance.

7. Assignment

Instruct students to revise Scene Three and prepare their manuscript for actors. Inform students when their final play is due.

Students may use remainder of class to:

- Begin revising Scene Three
- Get individual help from teacher or peers
- Proofread for one another
- Read first drafts of Scene Threes for one another, and comment.

8. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.

9. **Teaching Note** Prior to the performance, review and comment briefly on work collected today (final Scene Two). Return Scene Twos to students and collect final Scene Threes. Review and comment briefly on final Scene Threes. Allow time for students to prepare their manuscripts. For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.

LESSON 5: DRAMATIC STRUCTURE—Portfolio

Objectives

- Reading scenes aloud
- Introduce Graph of Dramatic Structure

Materials

- GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE — *class set*
- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Procedure

1. Ask students if they found the Sam/Chris scene assignment challenging? Fun? Discuss their reactions and impressions.
2. Select one or two Sam/Chris scenes (from Lesson 4) by asking:
 - Who worked hard and would like to have his/her scene read?
 - Who had trouble and would like our (teacher's and class') help?
 - Who would like to hear the dialogue outside of your head?

3. Have playwrights quickly describe their characters and choose classmates to read roles. *Actors rehearse in a corner, or outside the classroom, during the warm up. They pull the writer out of the warm up if they have questions.*

4. **Trust Circle warm up**

The goal of this exercise is for the leader, whose eyes are closed, to tag a student by moving quickly and listening.

The class stands in a circle. The teacher gives each student a number from 1–6. The teacher calls all the 1s into the middle of the circle and chooses one of the 1s as the leader. All of the 1s move around within the circle, staying clear of the leader. With eyes closed, the leader also moves within the circle, trying to touch another 1.

The students remaining in the circle form the wall. They put their hands in front of their bodies, palms facing toward the circle.

When the leader approaches the encircling “wall,” hands gently push the leader back into the circle. The students pushing may also say, “Wall.”

When the leader tags a student in the middle of the circle, group 1 rejoins the circle and group 2 repeats the sequence.



50+ minutes

Warm Up
Objective: Group trust



10 minutes

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 5—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE



This exercise is much more effective if all the students are absolutely silent (outside of saying “wall”).

Dramatic Structure



30 minutes



The exercise is over when each number has gone into the middle of the circle.

Call the number 1s to the middle of the circle and begin the exercise.

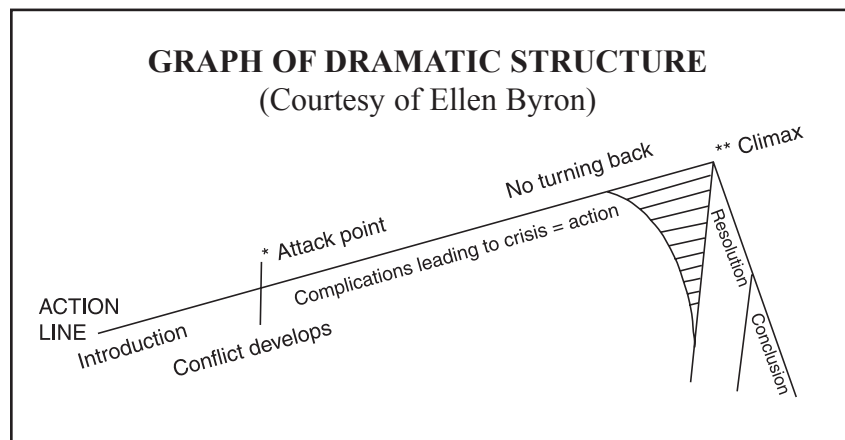
- Have students return to their seats. Actors begin by reading aloud any relevant information including the title, author, characters, setting, and what is seen “at rise.” To help the audience imagine the physical world of the play, actors read aloud only important stage directions. These include exits, entrances, and major actions (she hides behind the door, he puts his arms around her). When possible, actors follow (but don’t read aloud) directions for line readings. Have student actors read the scenes. After both readings, note the different choices made by the writers.

- Collect Sam/Chris scenes.

- Distribute GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE. Read or tell the following information.

Plays are built around characters. Most important of all is your main character. In a play, your main character goes on a journey, figuratively speaking. Each part of the journey is a scene. A scene takes place at one time in one place.

Talk through the GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE.



The action begins when we meet the characters, especially the main one, and learn background information, called exposition. The action at the start gets the ball rolling. This is the inciting incident that makes the main character discover what (s)he needs and decide to go after it (the attack point). In a one act play, this would be Scene One.

The conflict develops as the main character encounters obstacles as (s)he tries to get what (s)he wants. Often the obstacles are created by other characters. Tension builds—we call this rising action—as the character moves toward the climax. This might be Scene Two.

The climax occurs when the character takes action from which there is no turning back. After the point of no return, we learn whether the main character succeeds or fails to get what (s)he wants, and we discover the results of the character's journey. All of this might be in Scene three.

Let's go through the Graph of Dramatic Structure with a possible Sam/Chris scenario.

Scene One: Sam tells a friend that (s)he wants to go on a school field trip but knows Chris will not sign the permission slip. Sam forges Chris' signature.

Brainstorm possible trip destinations and reasons Sam believes Chris won't sign the permission slip. Examples might include:

- To a play or museum, parent believes subject matter is inappropriate
- To skating rink, parent does not have money for skate rental and food
- To a local factory, parent has recently been fired from job at the factory

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 5—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

Scene Two: The teacher calls all parents with additional information about the trip. Teacher speaks with Chris when Sam is in the shower. Chris discovers that his/her name was forged, and agrees to meet teacher with Sam tomorrow. *This is a good example of dramatic irony: the audience knows something important that a character does not know—that Chris knows about the forgery.*

Scene Three: Sam and Chris outside the teacher's room at school. Chris tells Sam (s)he knows about the forgery. Sam explains why (s)he forged the signature, revealing some information new to Chris. *Disclosing new information, or a secret, adds tension to the scene.*

Brainstorm with the class what the new information might be. For example:

- If trip is to a play or museum, Sam reveals that (s)he has already been there before and is mature enough to understand the material; or Sam reveals that (s)he disagrees with Chris' beliefs and feels ready to explore other beliefs
- If trip is to the skating rink, Sam reveals that a friend is lending him/her the money because Sam does not want to burden Chris with the request; or Sam reveals that (s)he hates being the only scholarship student in his/her class
- If trip is to the factory, Sam reveals that (s)he is worried about Chris being out of work and did not want to embarrass him/her by mentioning the trip



If you want to coach students during an improvisation, call out “freeze,” give suggestions, and then call out “continue.” If you notice the energy waning or students losing focus, end the improvisation by calling “scene.” These techniques help you support individual students, keep the group on task, and maintain a lively pace.

8. If time permits, ask for groups of 3s to improvise the above scenarios in front of the class. **A** is Chris, **B** is Sam, and **C** is the teacher. **C** will enter at your signal, when the scene is underway. Remind each character to refer to details from earlier scenes and to push for what (s)he wants or needs.
9. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
10. **Teaching Note** Prior to teaching Lesson 6, review and comment briefly on work collected today (Sam/Chris scene). For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.

LESSON 6: CREATING CHARACTERS—Portfolio

Objectives

- Begin to create characters
- Visualize a main character
- Write a monologue

Materials

- *Sarah's Monologue* from *The Inner Circle* — one

Procedure

1. **Tiger, Traps, People warm up**

The goal of this exercise is for one team to win three points. Points are acquired through luck and a bit of strategy.

Divide the class in half, with teams standing on either side of the room. This exercise is similar to the children's game "Rock, Paper, Scissors," which students may remember. Here the teams will choose to be Tigers, Traps, or People.

Explain that **Tigers** put their hands out in front of them like tiger paws and roar. They eat people. **People** put their arms down at their sides. They set traps. **Traps** put their arms directly out in front of them and clap their hands together like a trap. They catch tigers.

Each group huddles for 15 seconds to decide what to be. On cue, the groups face each other in the stance of Tigers, People, or Traps. The stronger group wins a point. If groups choose the same stance, neither wins.

The relative strengths are:

- Tigers eat People (Tigers win the point)
- People set Traps (People win)
- Traps capture Tigers (Traps win)

When one group acquires three points, the warm up is over.

2. Explain that you are going to read aloud a monologue from the beginning of a play called *The Inner Circle* by Patricia Loughrey. A high school student named Sarah is recalling the day she first met another student named Mark. A monologue is a long speech given by one character who may be addressing the audience, another character, an object, or thinking aloud.



50+ minutes

Warm Up
Objective: Teamwork



10 minutes

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 6—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

Visualizing a Main Character



20 minutes



3. Read aloud the monologue. Ask students the following questions:
 - What specific evidences of character does the writer give us?
 - Does the writer seem to understand Sarah? Care about her?
 - What details help you see Sarah in your imagination?
4. Instruct students to take out lined paper. Read or tell the following information.

We are going to do an exercise together to help you visualize a character you will create, possibly one of the main characters from your Play Idea Chart.

Number 1 to 10 along the left margin of your paper. I am going to ask you to close your eyes and visualize your character. Make sure the character is someone you can know well and care about. You “know” a character when you can imagine the world from his/her perspective.

Let the character take shape in your imagination. I will ask you to describe your character one item at a time. Listen to the questions the first time I go through them. Then open your eyes, listen again, and write down your choices.

Eyes closed, please.

Slowly, read the following list of questions once.

1. Is your character male or female?
2. Age? Be specific.
3. Ethnic background, if you see this clearly and it matters to you?
4. Hairstyle?
5. What is your character wearing on her/his feet? Be specific.
6. Anything particularly interesting about your character physically?
7. Your character is wearing something that was a gift. Describe it.
8. Your character is holding something in his/her hand. What is it?
9. Your character is experiencing a strong feeling. What is it?
10. Character’s name?

Ask students to open their eyes (no talking, please) and write their responses as you read the questions a second time.

5. Read or tell the following information.

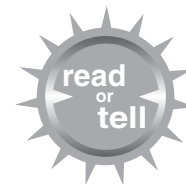
Now let yourself *hear* the character's voice.
Write a short monologue for your character.

A monologue is a long speech, often about a certain incident. Think about the 10 choices you have made, and let the monologue come from these. Your character may be addressing another character, or the audience, or thinking aloud, or talking to an object. What's on your character's mind?

6. Give students time to write a short monologue. When students have finished their monologues, listen to several lists and monologues (students read their own aloud).
7. Read or tell the following information.

Another way to learn about characters is to interview them. We are going to take some time and get to know your character. One of you will come up and read your list and monologue. Then you will *become* the character and answer questions from the class. This is another kind of improvising.

8. Choose or ask for a volunteer to come up and do this improvisation activity. You should model questions during the first interview. Most should be open-ended. Point out that you are building on what the character says. For example:
- Do you have siblings? (Yes) Are they older or younger? Does your sister ever tease you?
 - Why do you want to be a disc jockey? Do you know any?
 - Do you plan to go to college?
 - Do you know why you are afraid of...?
 - When you were younger, did you ever take a trip? With whom? Where?
 - You said you live with your mother. Does she work?



DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 6—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

9. Do several more interviews, or let students interview one another's characters in 2s, all working at the same time. If they work in 2s, conclude by asking the group for examples of:
 - One detail that you remember about the character you interviewed.
 - Something that surprised you about *your* character, now that your character is beginning to take on a life of his or her own.
10. Collect character lists and monologues.
11. Return Sam/Chris scene to each student, with your comments. Ask students if they have any questions.
12. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
13. **Teaching Note** Prior to teaching Lesson 7, review and comment briefly on work collected today (monologue). For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.

LESSON 7: BUILDING CONFLICT—Portfolio

Objectives

- Identify and use effective conflict in improvisations
- Write Scene One

Materials

- Tape (masking) — *one roll*

Classroom Setup

For the purposes of the warm up, clear a wide area of space in the classroom. Put a line of masking tape on the floor across one end of the room (see **Procedure #1** for more information).

Procedure

1. Cross the Line warm up

Prior to beginning this warm up, clear a wide area of space in the classroom and put a line of masking tape on the floor across one end of the room. The goal of this exercise is to cross the line of tape without being seen by the leader.

One student (the leader) stands behind the tape. Five students line up at the opposite end of the room, facing the line. The leader turns his/her back to the group. The five students start moving (walking, jumping, crawling) towards the line of tape. The leader turns around periodically to face the group.

The students freeze as soon as they see the leader begin to turn. If one student is still in motion when the leader turns around, the student goes to where (s)he started. The first person to cross the line of tape while the leader's back is turned is the new leader.

Five new people go to the starting place and the exercise is repeated.

2. Read or tell the following information.

Conflict is the heart of drama. We learn about characters, and identify with them, by watching them struggle to get something they want or need.



50+ minutes

Warm Up
Objective:
Concentration, Focus



10 minutes

Building Conflict



20 minutes

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 7—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

3. Improvisation One, or What Not to Do

Ask for or select two student volunteers to come to the front of the room to perform an improv.

The set up:

- **A** is a ninth grader, **B** is a math teacher. **A** has come to **B**'s classroom after school.

Whisper to A, so that no one can hear: "You want to borrow **B**'s purple pen."

Whisper to B, so that no one can hear: "Find at least two reasons to say no before saying yes, if you choose to say yes."

4. After the improvisation, which will be short and possibly silly, try a question such as:

- Did the scene hold your attention? Did you care about the characters? Want to know what happens next? (If response is yes) Would you watch a whole play about this?

Once you've agreed that the scene didn't work, lead students to recognize why:

- **A**'s "want" was trivial, unimportant.
- **A** needs to go after something that matters to **A** and to us. Then we'll identify with **A**, root for **A** as the character struggles. Making the conflict more important is called "raising the stakes."

5. Improvisation Two: Raising the Stakes

How can we raise the stakes? What might **A** go after? Choose a suggestion from the class and repeat the improvisation, with other actors. Examples include:

- **A** wants respect, asks **B** not to call **A** stupid during class.
- **A** wants fairness. Had bad headache during recent important test, wants to take it again, or do extra credit.
- **A** wants guidance. Shows **B** an inventive way of solving a problem. **B** is threatened by **A**'s knowledge, scorns it.

B must still find two reasons to say no, whatever the situation.

Watch and respond to this improvisation. Note that both **A** and **B** need to work harder to justify their choices. The tug of war between characters (conflict) is what keeps us engaged in drama.

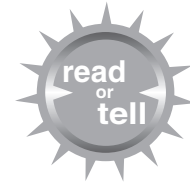
6. Read or tell the following information.

Think about your character and your Play Idea Chart. Write a first scene in your play. Remember: this is the inciting incident, the event that gets the ball rolling. Show us what makes your character decide to go after something. Be sure your character's "want" is important, something you cannot hold in your hand or touch.

7. Direct students to Playwriting Format: Writing the Scene in their PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY (distributed in Lesson 1). Read or tell the following information.

Use playwriting format. Begin with title (if it is known at this point), characters, setting, at rise. Keep the action in one place, at one time. There is a maximum of four characters. Type if possible; revising will be so much easier than if you write by hand. Minimum: 3 pages

8. Work with individual students. Answer questions about the comments you wrote on their Play Idea Charts (distributed to students with your comments at the end of Lesson 4). Make sure they are using the correct format. Help with ideas.
9. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
10. **Teaching Note** Students need to have their Scene One completed by Lesson 8.



In following preferred playwriting format, students should write their scripts on only one side of the page. This increases the script's readability.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 8—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE



50+ minutes



Remind students that it is a good way to get feedback.

Warm Up

Objective: Observation



10 minutes

LESSON 8: USING ACTION—Portfolio

Objectives

- Practice appropriate evaluation and feedback of other's work
- Use action and setting effectively
- Write Scene Two

Materials

- FEEDBACK — *class set*
- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Procedure

1. Read or tell the following information.

We read aloud scripts in progress to enjoy one another's ideas, to let the writer hear dialogue outside his/her head, to learn from our accomplishments, and to give one another help. Dialogue is meant to be heard!

2. Select one or two Scene Ones (from Lesson 7) by asking:
 - Who worked hard and would like to have his/her scene read?
 - Who had trouble and would like our (teacher's and class') help?
 - Who would like to hear the dialogue outside of your head?
3. Have playwrights quickly describe their characters and choose classmates to read roles. *Actors rehearse in a corner, or outside the classroom, during the warm up. They pull the writer out of the warm up if they have questions.*

4. **Gotcha! warm up**

The goal of this exercise is to find the Gotcha before the Gotcha finds you.

Students close their eyes and put their heads down on their desks. The teacher or a designated leader walks around the classroom and taps one person on the back. The leader stands off to the side and says, "There is a Gotcha in the room." Students walk around the room, slowly and silently, observing other members of the class as they walk.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 8—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

The student who was tapped, the Gotcha, walks among the others. When the Gotcha makes eye contact and winks at another person, that person continues walking for 5 seconds and then says, “Gotcha” in a loud voice and sits down. (S)He is silent for the rest of the round and cannot reveal the identity of the Gotcha to anyone.

The Gotcha continues to make eye contact and wink. The remaining students attempt to figure out the identity of the Gotcha, who should be as sneaky as possible when sending winks. If a student who is still walking around sees the Gotcha winking at someone else, (s)he says, “The Gotcha is (student’s name).” If (s)he is correct, the round ends and a new one begins. If not, (s)he sits down for the rest of the round.

5. Have students return to their seats. Ask student actors to return to their seats. Distribute **FEEDBACK** and discuss the appropriate ways to provide feedback. *Note: Be sure to review **Unit Elements #4, Giving and Eliciting Feedback** before leading this exercise.*
6. Have student actors read the scenes. Actors begin by reading aloud any relevant information including the title, author, characters, setting, and what is seen “at rise.” To help the audience imagine the physical world of the play, actors read aloud only important stage directions. These include exits, entrances, and major actions (she hides behind the door, he puts his arms around her). When possible, actors follow (but don’t read aloud) directions for line readings. After each reading use the following information to discuss the scene.
 - What kept you listening?
 - This worked for me... (Be specific: A character’s reaction, a certain relationship, a tactic, a line of dialogue)
 - Who else noticed something that worked?

The above questions focus on the *strengths* in the writing. If you feel comfortable offering a suggestion for improvement, do so; however it is too early to *solicit* suggestions from the class.

Your suggestions might be:

- Conflict: I don’t hear much conflict. Am I missing something? Remember, conflict must start to build in Scene One.
- Use dialogue and action to *show* us the story. Remember, the audience won’t see the stage directions, such as, “She has just failed a test.” How will you reveal this information to the audience?



A clever Gotcha should be able to take at least five people out.

Selected Scenes



15 minutes

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 8—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE



**The theatrical term for moment is “beat,” meaning a short time when the focus is on a particular issue or part of the conflict.*



Student pairs

- Creating multi-dimensional characters: Is the brother *always* angry? Try to make him a three-dimensional character by showing us other sides of him.
- Developing ideas: I was confused by **A** saying such-and-such... Perhaps you need to expand that moment*, or reveal more about **A**'s history earlier in the scene.

7. Collect scenes from students.

8. Read or tell the following.

Playwrights show us a story through action and setting, as well as dialogue. We're going to do an exercise to help you create action and setting in your scenes.

Brainstorm with students why and where these actions might occur:

- **A** is helping **B** get dressed... for a wedding, a competition, a performance
- **A** is watching **B** pack a suitcase... **B** is running away from home, going to the hospital, leaving for college, going to summer camp
- **A** and **B** are painting a wall... to cover up graffiti they sprayed, to prepare for a family visitor or new baby, as construction workers building a house

Choose a partner. In 2s, you will create an improvisation using one of these actions and one of your main characters. Select an action that fits the character. Decide together who the other character will be, why the two are doing the action, and where they are. Make sure there is a sense of urgency in the scene. As you improvise, let the relationship between **A** and **B** develop. Find a space where you and your partner can work, take a few minutes to plan, then begin the improvisation.

9. Tell students that if they finish the improvisation and others are still working, they should repeat the exercise, using the other partner's main character and a different action.
10. Circulate while pairs work. If a pair seems stuck, ask what choices have been made thus far. Once the choices are agreed upon, the improvisation will flow.

11. Have students return to their seats. Ask several to describe the situations they improvised.

12. **Assignment**

Read or tell the following information.

Your assignment is to write the scene that follows Scene One. Use action and setting to show the story and move it forward. In this scene the main character takes action(s) to get what (s)he wants. Think about the tactics the character will use. Take time to let the conflict and relationships develop. If one tactic fails, what might the character do next?

Use one setting and one time for each scene.

Use 2–4 characters; each character should contribute to the story and be multi-dimensional.

13. To help students get started, write the following on an overhead projector or board.

Scene Two

Characters: List the names of characters we've met in Scene One; list and describe any new characters

Setting:

At rise:

Read or tell the following information.

As you write your two connected scenes, we should learn a lot about your characters by the choices they make in Scene Two. Your characters should become increasingly individual. For example, you are not creating a “typical teenager,” you are creating a distinct individual who has a specific age, way of speaking, background, dream, and so forth.



Assign students to write a second unrelated scene or to revise Scene One, if that works better for your students' needs.



DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 8—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

14. Decide when Scene Two is due and inform your students. Instruct students to write three pages minimum; write as much as they need to write.
15. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
16. **Teaching Note** Students need to have their Scene Two completed by Lesson 9. Prior to teaching Lesson 9, review and comment briefly on work collected today (Scene One). For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.

From this point on, vary the pace to meet the needs of your group. *Consider asking students to rewrite Scene One if the work heard in class did not have:*

- Conflict
- Relationships that seem to be of importance to the writer
- Characters with admirable or likable qualities
- A main character with a “want” worth pursuing

Remind students that characters they create are characters they *control*. In life, adolescents rarely get to call the shots. As playwrights, they are in charge. This is an opportunity to *write candidly about issues that confuse or anger them*. Encourage students to dig in.

LESSON 9: REVIEW AND REVISION—Portfolio

Objectives

- Select strong example of own work to revise
- Begin revision
- Do It/Don't Do It

Materials

- Overhead projector or board — *one*
- Watch or clock with second hand

Procedure

1. Return Scene One to each student, with your comments. Ask students if they have any questions.
2. Select one to two Scene Twos (or revised Scene Ones), due today, to hear aloud. To solicit volunteers, ask the following questions.
 - Anyone need ideas?
 - Have questions about what you've written?

Writers describe characters, select actors; actors rehearse elsewhere while class does warm up.

3. **Yes! warm up**

The goal of this exercise is to always have a spot in the circle.

Students stand in a circle. One student (**A**) points to another student across the circle. As soon as **A** points to **B**, **B** says, “Yes!” (Students must say yes when pointed to.) **A** walks across the circle towards **B**'s spot. **B** must move before **A** gets there, but **B** may not move until **B** finds a new spot. Thus, **B** points to someone else in the circle, (**C**). **C** says, “Yes!” and **B** walks to **C**'s spot. By now, **A** has taken **B**'s spot and **B** has taken **C**'s spot. The round continues increasing in speed as students grow familiar with the process.

4. Have students return to their seats. Have student actors read the scenes. If actors are reading Scene Two, and the class has not heard Scene One, the writer should summarize the action in Scene One before actors begin. Actors begin by reading aloud any relevant information including the title, author, characters, setting, and what is seen “at rise.” To help the audience imagine the physical world of the play, actors read aloud only important stage directions. These include exits, entrances, and major actions (she hides behind the door, he puts his arms around her). When possible, actors follow (but don't read aloud) directions for line readings.



50+ minutes



Inform students that this is a good way to get feedback.

Warm Up Objective: Observation, Thinking and Moving Quickly



10 minutes



A student cannot move from one spot without first pointing at someone else and receiving a “Yes!”

Guide student feedback as needed.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 9—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

Selected Scenes



15 minutes



After a general question (What worked? Held your attention?), focus on the purpose of Scene Two with questions such as:

- Does the main character *take action*?
- What does (s)he do?

Note the difference between taking action (**A** tells the teacher that **B** has cheated) and being the passive recipient of another's action (**A** learns that **B** is circulating a rumor that **A** has cheated).

- Is **A**'s action in character?
- Does **A** work hard to achieve his want?
- Does tension build in the scene?
- Are we left wondering what will happen? (We *should* be left wondering, because Scene Two is not the conclusion)
- Do we care? (Ask this only when you know the answer is yes)
- What tactics are used?
- Do they surprise us (hold our attention), or are they predictable?

5. Collect Scene Twos.

6. Read or tell the following information.

Playwriting is rewriting. That's why we hear and comment on works in progress. The next two sessions will be spent revising work you select from your portfolios.

7. Write the following list on the overhead or board.

- Sam/Chris scene
- Monologue for main character
- Scene One (inciting incident)
- Scene Two (character takes action)

Read or tell the following information.

Here's a list of your portfolio entries. You're going to read through them and choose a piece you feel is strong and worthy of additional work...a piece you like.

8. Review what makes a strong piece of dramatic writing with your students. *As you elicit and list comments from the group, use your judgment as to how specific and complete the list should be. If writing is a challenge and students doubt their abilities, these main points, in the students' words, will be sufficient:*
- The writer shows empathy for and “knows” the main character
 - The main character is multi-dimensional
 - The main character goes after something important to her/him
 - The main character struggles to overcome obstacles
 - Each character has a distinct way of speaking

Advanced students might review the following list from the Writing Checklist in WRITING GUIDELINES.

A strong connection to the material

- Writer reveals empathy for characters, makes them believable in context of scene
- Characters have individual attributes, habits
- Dialogue is specific to each character
- Characters are multi-dimensional, even when based in fantasy
- Writer explores material he/she knows “from the heart”

Imagination

- Writer shows imagination through choice of characters, situations, and setting

Fresh use of language

- Writer uses details, sensory descriptions; avoids trite, predictable dialogue

Effective use of dramatic form

- Central character goes after something of importance to him/her
- Central character tries to overcome obstacles
- Actions of central character create dramatic tension
- Environment (setting) contributes to the story and is reflected in the dialogue
- Necessary background information (exposition) is revealed through dialogue
- Key events are *shown*, not told

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 9—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE



If students are likely to lose papers, have them leave the selected pieces in their portfolios in class. Otherwise, instruct them to work on the pieces at home, and bring them back for the next class, which will also focus on revision.

If a student chooses to revise Scene Two and does not have a saved version on his/her computer, you will need to return Scene Two (collected earlier in this lesson) to the student.

Do It/Don't Do It



20+ minutes



This exercise is also called Angel/Devil, from the cartoon depiction of a person with an Angel on one shoulder and a Devil on the other. We prefer Do It/Don't Do It, because that title is nonjudgmental.



Use the watch or clock with a second hand for the timing purpose.

9. Instruct students to read through their portfolio entries and select one piece they like and consider worthy of additional work. Encourage students to ask for opinions and suggestions from their peers. Remind students to make sure of the following:
 - Their work is legible (typed if possible)
 - In the correct format
 - Pages are numbered
 - Make every word count
 - Omit words they do not need
 - Add dialogue and action that will help the audience understand and care about the characters
10. If time permits, explain that the following exercise helps build characters and conflict. It is called Do It/Don't Do It. Explain that in this exercise, a character, **C**, has a difficult decision to make. One internal voice, **A**, tells the character to do an action; the other internal voice, **B**, says not to do it. After listening to arguments from both sides, **C** makes a decision.
11. Model the exercise

Ask or choose three students to come to the front of the room. **A** and **B** stand on either side of **C**. Use one of the situations below.

C is a large old family dog. **C** is alone in the kitchen. The fully cooked Thanksgiving turkey is on the table at **C**'s eye level. **C** is hungry. Should **C** eat the turkey? *This light-hearted example lets students learn the format before diving into controversial subjects.*

C has been called in to see the school counselor. **C** knows a friend has cheated on an important test (or is doing drugs). **C** thinks the counselor will ask about the test (or the drugs). Should **C** answer the counselor truthfully?

For any scenario chosen, **A**'s job is to persuade **C** to do it; **B** will argue not to do it.

A speaks, *uninterrupted*, for one minute. **B** does the same. Then **A** reiterates his/her strongest argument for 5 seconds; **B** does the same.

C thinks over the arguments and announces his/her decision. The class may also vote.

A and B should use logic, emotion, humor, history, as many different tactics as possible. Examples:

- A argues to eat the turkey because:
 - they'll think it was the other dog in the family
 - you don't like the dog food you're given
 - you're part of the family and should share in the celebration
 - you can impress the lady dog you like by bringing her a turkey leg
 - everyone should take risks now and then
- B argues not to eat the turkey because:
 - you might choke on the soft bones
 - you have to be a good example for the puppy in the family
 - you'll ruin their family dinner
 - they trust you
 - you have a reputation to maintain

12. Do It/Don't Do It using ideas from students' plays
Repeat the exercise with decisions suggested by students, from their plays.
- Think about your main character. Is (s)he facing a difficult choice? Set it up for us.
 - Having trouble creating the obstacles in Scene Two? Set up Do It/Don't Do It.

This exercise leads to lively discussions about what characters want, tactics they choose, risks they take, and consequences. It may also lead to students writing a long speech in which a character thinks out loud while deciding what to do (an internal monologue).

13. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.
14. **Teaching Note** Prior to teaching Lesson 10, review and comment briefly on work collected today (Scene Two). For assistance with comments see **Lesson 3, Procedure #9**.



It is especially important that students follow preferred playwriting format, including writing their scripts on one side of each page, when completing the revision process.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 10—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE



50+ minutes

LESSON 10: FINISHING TOUCHES—Portfolio

Objectives

- Continue revision process
- Choose title for selected piece
- Prepare title page
- Discuss and practice using rhythm in dialogue

Materials

- Overhead projector or board — *one*

Setup

1. Before class, write what to include on the title page on a transparency or on the board.
2. Read the example rhythm scene before teaching Lesson 10, **Procedure #6** (see **Student Examples**).
3. Write the word count for the rhythm scene on a transparency or the board ahead of class. Display this when appropriate (see **Procedure #7**).

Procedure

1. Return Scene Two to each student, with your comments. Ask students if they have any questions.
2. **When I Dance warm up**
The goal of this exercise is to create a “dance” by remembering and performing all the moves of the previous players.

Students stand in a circle. Student **A** says, “When I dance, I dance like this.” **A** makes one movement with his/her body (e.g., kicks leg up, throws hands in air, turns around in a circle). **A** repeats the movement several times.

The student to **A**’s right, **B**, says, “When I dance, I dance like this.” **B** repeats **A**’s movement and adds one of his/her own. The student to **B**’s right, **C**, goes next and so forth.

The warm up requires increasingly more concentration with each additional player.

After everyone has added a move, the teacher asks, “Who can do the whole dance on his/her own?” Individual students demonstrate the whole dance.

Warm Up Objective: Memory



10 minutes



Encourage students to make bold or silly movement choices to add variety to the dance.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 10-PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

- Discuss the final presentation. Tell students when it will be, who will read their selections, and how you will choose and arrange the selections. Explain that you will include work from as many writers as time permits. Encourage the entire class to attend the performance if it is outside school hours.

Note to teacher: If you're worried about time, make sure to give priority to selections from students who have worked hard during the unit. The class knows who they are, and will take pride in the quality of work from the group. Arrange the pieces however you like (thematically works well), varying the content and style to keep the audience engaged. Ask your actors for suggestions if you'll see them prior to the performance.

- Students need to choose a title for their selections. Inform students that the title should be memorable and catch attention. They may get ideas from a phrase of dialogue or the name of one of their characters.

Share the following with your students:

Selecting a title can be tough. One of the most romantic, well known play titles is *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In early drafts, Tennessee Williams called the play *The Poker Night*. What a difference!

Show students how to prepare a title page. Tell them this will be helpful if they choose to expand their scenes into a play and for future plays.

Preparing the title page

Include the text below, arranged as shown in drawing in margin.

Title

A play by Author's Name

Contact information: Person to contact (*agent/author*)

Address, phone, email

Copyright symbol (lower case "c" in a circle), date,
name of person holding copyright

For example:

THE BEST MISTAKE

A play by Great Writer

Contact: Great Writer

Address

Phone

email address

©2001 by Great Writer

Final steps



15+ minutes



Include this information on the overhead for student reference.

Title

A play by _____

© _____

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 10—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE



Include this information on the overhead for student reference.

Rhythm Scene



20+ minutes



Teenagers love their music; they will give lots of examples.

On the next page

Include:

- A list of all the characters in the play, with a brief description of each
- Brief information about the setting

Preparing the manuscript

Inform students of the following (or write on the transparency):

- Proofread carefully.
 - Number the pages.
 - Type the script (required by professional readers and contests) or use dark ink, so pages will photocopy clearly.
 - Write on one side of paper only.
 - Use a clip to hold pages together; do not staple.
5. Inform students when their revised selections, ready to be read aloud, are due.
 6. Give time in class to complete revisions, or finish the unit with the following exercise, which ties into students' musical tastes as it challenges them to use information learned from the unit.

Read or tell the following information.

You know from listening to music that fast and slow rhythms evoke different responses. What happens to you when you listen to fast music? Slow? House music (repetitive beat)?

Rhythm is also important in dialogue. A character may:

- speak quickly or slowly
- vary the pace depending on the situation
- use few words, short statements
- use complicated sentences
- have speech habits (*Like... so I go, and he goes, and I go*)

Changes in rhythm keep us listening, as this exercise will show.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

LESSON 10—PORTFOLIO

STAGE WRITE

7. Instruct students to take out a piece of paper and number 1–50, along the left margin. Inform students that they are going to write (alone or in 2s) a scene with two characters. **A** speaks, then **B** speaks, and so on. The writer has only 50 lines in which to reveal the characters, the problem, and their efforts at resolution.

Here's the challenge: Students must make every word count (pardon the pun), using only the word count below (write this on a transparency or the board):

Lines	1–20:	2 to 4 words per speech
Lines	21–30:	1 to 2 words
Lines	31–36:	1 word
Lines	37,38:	20 words or more
Lines	39–45:	4 to 6 words
Lines	46–50:	1 to 2 words

Model a scene verbally with one of the students, e.g.:

- | | | |
|------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1. Don't jump. | Or | 1. Great game. |
| 2. Why not? | | 2. You really liked it? |
| 3. Because I love you! | | 3. 'Course I did. |
| 4. Now you say it. | | 4. I'm embarrassed. |
| 5. Come in. Please. | | 5. How come? |
| 6. I'm desperate. | | 6. You didn't see? |

Have students write Rhythm Scenes, working as long as they are engaged. Everyone needn't complete all 50 lines.

8. Listen to several scenes. Have students look at how much they have communicated in very few words. Ask students what happens to them as a listener when the rhythms change, especially between line 36 and 37?
9. Instruct students to place completed work and handouts in their folders, or take work in progress home to complete.



Write these guidelines on the overhead for students to follow.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

PERFORMANCE

STAGE WRITE



In Playwrights Project, we sometimes present a group of plays (or scenes) in class on the final day, and other plays (scenes) for the evening performance.

Students sometimes like to participate in warm ups or improv as part of the performance. This provides an additional way to involve many students.

PERFORMANCE

Plays are written to be performed. Leave enough time between **Lesson 10** and **Performance** to copy work to be read aloud. If a script has three characters, make three copies; the teacher or a student will use the original to read aloud stage directions.

Choosing What to Present

If students have created portfolios, select work from as many as possible. Ask each student to give you the work (s)he would most like to see performed. Organize the selections according to theme, or mood, or whatever seems entertaining to you. Start and end with a particularly strong piece.

If students have completed plays, select full plays or scenes from a number of plays. Either works well; however, the latter involves more writers.

Usually 45–60 minutes is ample time for a reading. If you plan to go longer, schedule a brief intermission after about 40 minutes. Estimate 1 1/2 minutes per page of dialogue.

In one class session, 8–10 pieces, depending on the length of each, will complete your performance. In a longer performance, with an intermission, you may select 10–14 pieces to showcase.

Enhancements

- A short program can be extended by having students demonstrate some of the warm ups for the audience, some of whom might want to join in.
- Another delightful element to show is improvisation, particularly if professional actors are part of the culmination. They might extend an idea in one of the scenes through improvisation. Good actors are inventive; enlist their imaginations.

Performance Space

Choose a small, comfortable space rather than an auditorium. The work may be lost in a large hall. Chairs or stools will be enough to create an “acting area” in a classroom or multipurpose room.

Finding Actors

Try to engage three adult actors for the performance. Three will be enough because you will use “nontraditional casting,” where gender, age, race and ethnic background are not limiting characteristics. A good actor (the word “actor” is used for male or female) loves a challenge, even to reading several roles in the same script.

Look for people who are good at doing “cold readings,” which means the actors don’t see the scripts in advance. This gives an actor who is dyslexic, and may have trouble sight reading, a chance to decline. Ask the actors to arrive 30 minutes before you plan to start. Show them to a quiet place where they can skim the scripts. Give them a list of who will read which roles, or mark each script accordingly. Don’t agonize over casting; good actors have amazing range and often give excellent readings as teenage characters.

To contact actors, call:

- The administrative offices of theatres in your town
- Drama departments at local colleges and universities
- High school drama teachers
- Friends who work with nonprofit arts organizations as board members, volunteers, or performers
- Umbrella organizations that serve nonprofit groups, such as a local theatre league, or dance alliance, or center for nonprofit management.

Many actors like reading original work, and rarely have the opportunity to do so. They enjoy performing for young people. Many appreciate the chance to use their talents for an appreciative audience, in an intimate setting. Readings are fun, because they require no preparation.

Stipend

If you can offer a stipend, do so. Actors may be happy to donate their services once or twice, or work for travel expenses.

Preparing Students to Perform

If your students will be performing their own writing, give them time to rehearse. Remind them to work on “acting with their voices.” Trying to add movement or sets, given the short time, will detract from the work. Remind students that the emphasis is on the writing, not on acting.



Use the Theatre Letter for reference when soliciting actors.



Note: In the year 2001, the author suggests starting at \$25 an hour.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

PERFORMANCE

STAGE WRITE

These pointers will help students perform successfully:

- Stand up while reading
- Send your voice to the back of the house
- Don't turn your back to the audience
- Hold the script below your face

The Audience

If the reading is during school hours, invite younger classmates as the audience. Evening performances are convenient for adult family members. A one-sheet listing the order of pieces and the writers adds excitement to an evening culmination.

Someone (preferably you) should welcome the audience, explain what they will be watching, and introduce each scene. Taking this role yourself allows you to control the pace of the performance. For example, if you have a great many pieces to present and you notice that the writer of the first one is not present, change the order. Hopefully the late student will arrive and you will have time for her piece. In the meantime, other students will be thrilled as they listen to their dialogue come to life.

Evaluation of STAGE WRITE

If you choose to complete a student evaluation of the unit use the Evaluation Questions for reference (found in the Introduction tab of this Teacher Notebook). These questions provide an optional evaluation of this unit and self-reflection of student learning.

PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY



STAGE WRITE

As a playwright, you will show the audience a story by putting characters into action. You will write about whatever you choose, drawing on what you have experienced, what you have observed, and what you imagine.

Elements of a scene or play

- Characters — fictional people, animals, or objects
- Conflict — the tension or problem that occurs when a character does not get what (s)he wants
- Setting — time and place, the environment of the scene or play
- Plot — the main events that occur, which can be physical (sneaking out of the house) or emotional (discovering he is in love)

Play Idea Chart

1. Character	2. Wants or needs	3. From	4. Obstacle	5. Action	6. Result

Improvisation means “to make up on the spur of the moment.” Think of improvisation as “playwriting on your feet.” It’s a tool used by actors and writers to spark ideas and try out possibilities.

The basic rules of improvisation

- Stay in character
If a student falls out of character, the partner can react in character (Young lady, what’s funny about what I just said?) or the teacher can freeze (stop) the action and ask why the character behaved in that way? Being silly comes from lack of concentration.
- Accept the facts. If the parent says the mouse cage is open, the teenager doesn’t say, “What mouse cage? I don’t have one.”
- Answer questions. A character must answer questions with information, not brush them off with responses like, “Because.”
- Build on what your partner gives you
- Watch, listen, ask questions of your partner

Playwriting Format: Writing the Scene

Title

(May be chosen after scene is completed)

At left margin, list each character, with a brief descriptive phrase:

Characters: Name, age, etc.

Setting: *indicates time and place*

At rise: *what the audience sees when the play starts, or the “curtain rises”*

Skip a line. Put the name of the character who speaks in capital letters in the center of the page. Write dialogue without quotation marks. Put stage directions in parentheses.



WRITING GUIDELINES

STAGE WRITE

- Every character you create is fictional, so give him, her, or it a fictional name.
- Avoid using names of people in your class.
- Avoid using names of characters from television, film or books. Someone else has already done the creative work.
- Create your story without using physical violence, weapons, or death on stage.
- Give every character you create at least one quality you can genuinely admire, respect, or like.
- Use language appropriate for school. You can change it when you are produced in a theatre.
- Avoid park benches for now. Other settings will give you more to work with.
- Insane characters, because of their illness, do not behave rationally. Save them for later plays.

Writing Checklist

To write a well-crafted play you must include the following elements. When writing, be sure to consider this checklist. Your teacher will use this to evaluate your work.

A strong connection to the material

- _____ Writer reveals empathy for characters, makes them believable in context of scene/play
- _____ Characters have individual attributes, habits
- _____ Dialogue is specific to each character
- _____ Characters are multi-dimensional, even when based in fantasy
- _____ Writer explores material he/she knows “from the heart”

Imagination

- _____ Writer shows imagination through choice of characters, situations, and setting

Fresh use of language

- _____ Writer uses specific details, sensory descriptions; avoids trite, predictable dialogue

Effective use of dramatic form

- _____ Central character goes after something of importance to him/her
- _____ Central character tries to overcome obstacles
- _____ Actions of central character create dramatic tension
- _____ Environment (setting) contributes to the story and is reflected in the dialogue
- _____ Necessary background information (exposition) is revealed through dialogue
- _____ Key events are *shown*, not told

WHAT IS A SCENE?

(COURTESY OF PATRICIA LOUGHREY)



STAGE WRITE

A scene is a unit of action which, when combined with other scenes, builds a play. In some ways, a scene is to a play as a chapter is to a book. A scene has a beginning, middle, and end, and tells a story which is a smaller piece of the overall story.

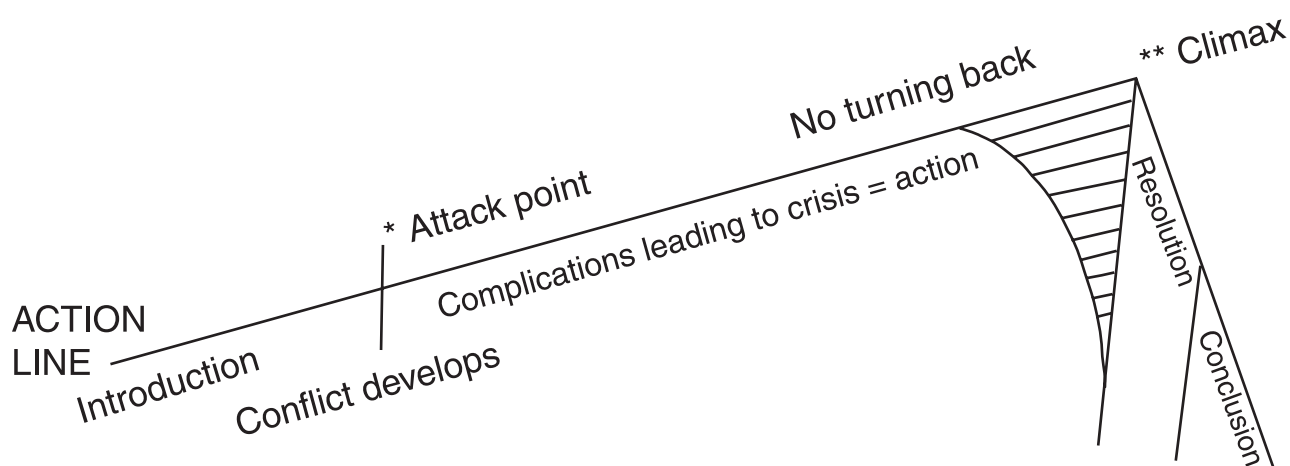
Key elements in a scene are:

- Setting** Time and place where the action occurs.
- Characters** People in the scene. Each character should want something. The ways they go after what they want should help us discover as much as possible about these individuals. A seemingly ordinary situation can become drama when the characters are believable, and go 100% for what they want.
- Conflict** Tension that emerges when a character does not get what (s)he wants. The harder you make it for your characters to get what they want, the richer your scene will become. Characters may never get what they want. It is helpful if they have opposing wants and needs.
- Dialogue** Words (lines) characters speak to each other, themselves, or the audience. We learn about characters by *what* they say and *how* they say it. For example, here are two characters asking for the same thing:
- LEROY
- For crying out loud, you jerk, just give me the newspaper and shut cher trap. (*What kind of guy is Leroy?*)
- SIMON
- Gee, when you're finished, if you don't mind, if it's okay, could I maybe see the newspaper? (*What kind of guy is Simon?*)
- Action** Another way we learn about character. Action can be physical: slamming a door, hiding an envelope, hugging someone. It can be emotional: deciding to end a thirty-year marriage, revealing a secret, asking for help.



GRAPH OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE (COURTESY OF ELLEN BYRON)

STAGE WRITE



Introduction We meet characters, especially main one, and learn some background (exposition)

Major dramatic question What does character want or need?

Attack point Character has decided what (s)he wants and decides to go after it

Complications Every character introduced should complicate the story

Climax Whether character succeeds or not; no turning back from this point in the story

Every scene should follow this structure, though rules are meant to be stretched and sometimes broken.



During your playwriting sessions, students will share their writing with the class, and the class will provide feedback to the writer. The goal of these experiences is to work together to assist the writer in clarifying and organizing the playwriting. It is vital that students are respectful of one another in providing this feedback. Below are some guidelines to assist you when in this role.

1. Focus on the Strengths First

Think about the following questions:

- What kept you listening?
- Did you identify with one character in particular? Why?
- Was there one moment that jumped out at you?
- What made you laugh?
- Was there one element of drama that was particularly effective?
- How about the setting. Why did it work so well? What would have been lost if the action had been elsewhere?
- What did the character want? (conflict) What else? How did (s)he try to get it? Were you surprised by the tactic (s)he used?
- What evidences of character did the playwright give us about a specific character? Think about the character's history, what was said, what wasn't said, the character's actions.

2. Constructive Criticism

When giving constructive criticism, think about the following questions:

- Were you ever confused? When?
- What questions do we want to have answered?
- Did you learn enough about the characters? Spend enough time getting to know them?
- Where in the play might this scene fit: beginning? middle? end?

3. Be specific

Do not just say, "I liked the moment when..." or "I did not like the way the father reacted," give the specifics (e.g., why did you like it?; what made it work?).

4. Choices

Give the writer an opportunity to justify his/her choices. For example, a thoughtful audience member once said, "Mothers don't act like that." Perhaps not in the speaker's experience. She would not choose to write the mother in question, but the playwright *did*. Now the writer's job is to justify the mother's behavior by pulling us more deeply into the world of the play. If the writer shows us the character in relationships, and gives us time to know her, we may accept her behavior as not only believable, but inevitable—the ultimate goal.

ABOUT THE SAMPLE SCENES



STAGE WRITE

Forever Friends was written in 1989 by Mary Frakes as the final assignment in her 8th grade playwriting residency. Frakes lived in an ethnically diverse neighborhood in San Diego. In this scene about two girls who are best friends, she combines experience, observation, and imagination.

Swim, Sandy, Swim was written by Karin Lydersen at age 12, and produced by Playwrights Project in *Plays by Young Writers 1987*. Scene One sets up a conflict between Sandy, a seventh grader, and her mother. In subsequent scenes (not included), Sandy intentionally loses an important swimming race to show her controlling mother that intense competition is making Sandy unhappy. Her mother apologizes for pushing Sandy so hard. Lydersen became an Olympic swimmer and now works as a journalist.

Santa Does a Mitzvah was written by Mabelle Reynoso at age 16, and produced in *Plays by Young Writers 1995*. (A “mitzvah” is a good deed in Yiddish.) Aaron Epstein is a precocious 8-year-old. Disappointed with this year’s Chanukah presents, Aaron is persuaded by his friend Frankie to send a gift list to Santa Claus. Eventually Santa and the Epstein’s rabbi meet and teach the boys that both holidays are about miracles, not money. Reynoso started *Santa* during a playwriting workshop at school. Now she writes professionally and works in television.

Auto was written by Todd Peters at age 17, and produced in *Plays by Young Writers 1987*. We include an excerpt from Scene One, prior to which Derrick, age 15, has had a fight with his father. To ease the tension in the house, Derrick’s mother insists that he drive with her to the supermarket. The play’s title refers to the setting, in the car, and to Derrick’s wish for independence.

The Hairpiece is a scene by George C. Wolfe from his play *The Colored Museum*. In this funny scene with a political subtext, two wigs argue about which one of them will be worn by their owner, Woman, when she breaks up with her good-for-nothing boyfriend. A leading African American playwright and director, Wolfe is the artistic director of the Public Theatre in New York City.

Sarah’s Monologue comes from *The Inner Circle*, a play written by Patricia Loughrey in the early 1980’s, when the AIDS virus was beginning to gain attention in the United States. This excerpt is from the first published edition of the play. Early in the opening scene, a high school student recalls her first meeting with a dear friend who has recently died from the disease. The most recent edition of the play is *The Inner Circle: Changing Times*.

For Lesson 1, select two contrasting scenes with *content* that will engage your class.

These pieces can also be used throughout the unit as examples of:

Character development — *Forever Friends, Swim, Santa, Auto, Hairpiece, Sarah’s Monologue*

Setting — *Forever Friends, Laboratory Revenge, Auto, Hairpiece*

Plot — *Forever Friends, Laboratory Revenge, Sarah’s Monologue*

Dialogue — *Santa, Auto, Hairpiece, Sarah’s Monologue*



FOREVER FRIENDS BY MARY FRAKES

STAGE WRITE

Scene One

Characters: NGUYET, a Vietnamese American girl, age 13
LISA, an Anglo-American, age 13

Setting: Time—After school
Place—In Nguyet's house, a faded blue with the paint crackling.

At rise: Nguyet is showing Lisa her house.

NGUYET

This is your first time coming over. What's so important?

LISA

I just wanted to see your house while I still can. I mean, I just wanted to see what it looks like.

NGUYET

We have to be quiet because my grandfather is sleeping.

LISA

Do you have your own room?

NGUYET

No. I have to share it with my big sister.

LISA

Where are your sisters and brothers?

NGUYET

They're all working. That's the advantage of being the youngest.
My room is the last one. Actually, I share it with my sister. (They go upstairs. Nguyet's room is small, with twin beds and there are many poems on Nguyet's side of the wall.)

LISA

(Pointing to the poems) What are these?

NGUYET

Those are some poems I wrote.

LISA

(Reading the poems) These are really good. You should enter the school's poem contest. You'd have a good chance of winning.

FOREVER FRIENDS



STAGE WRITE

NGUYET

I didn't think they were that good.

LISA

(Looking at the books on Nguyet's shelves) You like Maya Angelou's books?

NGUYET

Yeah. I base all my poems on her books. My favorite is "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings." I think my poem on this book is the best. I want to be a poet when I grow up.

LISA

Why does "the caged bird" sing?

NGUYET

Well, why don't you read it and find out. Your answer could be different than mine.

LISA

I guess I will. Nguyet, have you ever been blood sisters with anyone?

NGUYET

No. Why?

LISA

Well, I think it would be cool if we did it.

NGUYET

Are you sure? Will it hurt?

LISA

Not really. (Pause) Do you want to become blood sisters?

NGUYET

Well, I guess so.

LISA

Go get two pins, but put them in hot water first. (Nguyet exits and comes back a minute later with two pins.) Now, you go. (Nguyet pricks her left index finger) Okay. Ready? 1...2...3...(They put their index fingers together).

NGUYET

Cool.



FOREVER FRIENDS

STAGE WRITE

LISA

All done. (Pause) Nguyet, I have to tell you something and when I tell you, please don't get mad. My parents don't like you because you're Oriental. They don't like anyone who is Oriental. I don't know why they said all this crud about Orientals. I didn't listen to them. They didn't want me to hang around you anymore. They think you're dangerous.

NGUYET

Didn't you tell them not all Orientals are like that?

LISA

I did, but they're so stubborn.

NGUYET

You mean, you're not supposed to be here?

LISA

Nope. My parents don't want me hanging around any Orientals. If you call me again, tell them your name is, um, Autumn. (Looks at watch) Oh my gosh, I'm late! (Runs down the stairs). Bye, Autumn I'll return the book next week. (She exits.)

NGUYET

Lisa, wait! (Lisa has already left.) I hate the name Autumn.

END OF SCENE

SWIM, SANDY, SWIM

BY KARIN LYDERSEN



STAGE WRITE

Scene One

Characters: SANDY VEDULA, a seventh grade girl
MRS. VEDULA, Sandy's mother

Setting: After school, in the Vedula's kitchen

At rise: Mrs. Vedula is sitting at the kitchen table reading a book and drinking a coke.

SANDY

(Enters) Hi Mom.

MRS.V

Hi. Are you ready for the big meet tomorrow?

SANDY

What? Oh, the meet. Yeah, I guess I'm ready.

MRS.V

(Annoyed) You guess! You had better be ready! This is your big chance to win! This is the Junior Olympics, and you're seeded second! This...

SANDY

Okay. Okay. I am ready.

MRS. V

Good. How was school?

SANDY

Fine. Same as always. Everyone called me Rudolph. I got an A on the science test. I got a B on the spelling quiz.

MRS.V

Why did people call you Rudolph?

SANDY

Oh, just because I have a cold and I blew my nose a lot.

MRS.V

A cold!

SANDY

Yeah. I felt pretty awful. I had a headache and cramps and stuff. I wanted to call you, but Mrs. Felton wouldn't let me.



SWIM, SANDY, SWIM

STAGE WRITE

MRS.V

Well, of all the times to get a cold! I told you not to go out without a jacket on Tuesday morning! Do you have much homework?

SANDY

Not really.

MRS.V

You're like I was. I always used to get my homework done in school.

SANDY

You're pretty smart, aren't you, Mom?

MRS.V

(Irritated) Don't be silly!

SANDY

You are smart, Mom. Dad may say you're not, but you are.

MRS.V

(Sighing) I guess I was smart, but not anymore. When I was in school I worked so hard. I loved learning. It was my dream to be a doctor. My idea of a perfect life was to be in the Olympics as a swimmer and then become a doctor. I never was that good at swimming, though. Not near as good as you.

SANDY

Gee, I never knew all this Mom. It's hard to imagine you as a doctor. Why didn't you become one.

MRS.V

Because of your father. I met him and I was so in love I forgot all about my dreams. We got married two months after we met. I never stopped to think how life would be as a married woman. All I do now is clean and organize and read. (More brightly) But all that's history. Come and help me start dinner.

SANDY

(Complaining) Oh Mom, I wanted to work on my story a little before swimming practice.

MRS. V

(Angrily) No one ever helps me! It seems like I'm just the slave of this house! Let me give you some advice, Sandy. When you grow up, don't get married and don't have kids! Now help me make dinner for a change.

SWIM, SANDY, SWIM



STAGE WRITE

SANDY

(Also angrily) I haven't worked on my story in weeks. I have so little time with my swimming practice every day!

MRS.V

Okay. Fine. Work on your story. I should have known my carefree daughter would never help me.

SANDY

All right, Mom. I will help.

MRS.V

No, go on. Really, it's okay (Sandy sighs and walks out. Mrs. Vedula starts to get some food out for dinner, but then stops, angrily talking to herself)

MRS.V

Damn, damn, damn!
(The telephone rings)

MRS.V

Hello...Sandy, phone!

SANDY

(Entering and picking up the phone) Hi...Really?...That's too bad...(Excitedly) Really? Wow! Great! I mean, I'm sorry your sister got sick, but...I hope Mom lets me go...What should I bring?...Thanks, I'll call you back. Bye! (She hangs up)

MRS.V

What was that about?

SANDY

That was Janice Filker from the swim team. Her dad is taking her to a Smashing Pumpkins concert tonight. Her sister, who was going, got sick so they have an extra ticket. She invited me. Can I go? Please can I go?

MRS.V

Certainly not! You'd be missing practice, and staying up late the night before the meet too.

SANDY

(Pleading) Oh Mom! Janice is going. She's in the Junior Olympics too.

MRS.V

I said no.



SWIM, SANDY, SWIM

STAGE WRITE

SANDY

No! Mom, Smashing Pumpkins tickets cost \$60! You can never get them. Mom, this is my big chance. Please let me go!

MRS.V

(Loudly) I said no! Don't say another word. Get ready for swimming practice.

SANDY

(Walking out angrily) Swim, Swim, Swim! All I do is swim!

MRS.V

(Yelling after her) You want to make the Olympics, don't you! You want to make something of yourself, don't you! (To herself) I can't understand her.

END OF SCENE

SANTA DOES A MITZVAH

BY MABELLE REYNOSO



STAGE WRITE

Scene One

Characters: AARON EPSTEIN, a precocious eight-year-old boy
FRANKIE, Aaron's friend

Setting: The Epstein's living room, daytime

At rise: Aaron is playing with his new toy, a fire engine that makes noises. Frankie is playing with a high tech robot.

AARON

You want to trade for a while?

FRANKIE

Nah. My robot is better than your crummy truck.

AARON

Don't insult my toys.

FRANKIE

I'm just being honest. Zoltar can blast your truck away any day of the week. See these lights (Frankie points to some lights on the robot) They're lasers.

AARON

Technology is the agent of the devil. Come on, let me play with it.

FRANKIE

Nope.

AARON

Aren't you tired of it yet? You've had it for a year.

FRANKIE

So?

AARON

I think you ought to share. That's all I'm saying.

FRANKIE

What for? What's in it for me?

AARON

It'll make you a better person. That's what Rabbi Hershel says. Don't you want to be a better person?



SANTA DOES A MITZVAH

STAGE WRITE

FRANKIE

No. I like me just fine, thanks.

AARON

Well, then what about variation? If you play with the same toy incessantly, you're going to get sick of it and one day you're just going to hate it and crush it. It won't make any difference if it has lasers or not.

FRANKIE

Hmmm. That's an interesting point. You got any other new stuff better than that truck? I mean you got presents every day for the past week, right?

AARON

Yeah. But this is the only toy I got. I kept getting sweaters and scarves and things. Yesterday, a package came in the mail from my grandma. She always sends me good stuff but you know what she sent me this time?

FRANKIE

No, what?

AARON

A nail manicuring set. I gave it to my dad.

FRANKIE

Man, I'm sorry to hear it. See, the thing with me is that I only get presents once, on Christmas Day, but they're good presents. I always get all the toys I want.

AARON

Yeah, wise guy? And how do you manage that?

FRANKIE

Oh, it's real easy. All I got to do is write a letter, give it to my mom to mail, and I let Santa Claus do his work.

AARON

Santa Claus. The big fat guy with the white hair and red suit? You're joking, right?

FRANKIE

No, I'm not joking. He takes care of my needs.

AARON

Oh yeah, what does he do for you?

SANTA DOES A MITZVAH



STAGE WRITE

FRANKIE

Don't you know about Santa Claus?

AARON

Apparently not. I'm Jewish. As far as I'm concerned, Santa Claus is a one-man mall freak show.

FRANKIE

Aaron, you're a product of American commercial television. First of all, those Santas in the mall and on the streets, they're all fake. Real phonies trying to make life harder for the guy. Who'd ever think Santa would have competitors? There's only one Santa Claus and he lives in the North Pole.

AARON

You're telling me that there's an overweight guy who lives in the Arctic who gives you all the presents you want? That's ridiculous. Honestly Frankie, I expected a little more from you. I never thought you were this gullible.

FRANKIE

Aaron, sadly enough, your mind has been trained to suspect. Hasn't anyone ever told you about the true Santa Claus?

AARON

Yes, but they were all skeptics. Frankie, you're my only Catholic friend and that's just because you live next door. I don't have too much contact with the ways of the Gentile.

FRANKIE

Let me clear up this confusion. Santa Claus is the greatest man to ever live. He's the nicest guy. His real name is Nick. Nicholas. And he lives with his wife but I don't know what her name is. And they don't have any kids because they consider the children of the world their own.

AARON

Oh sure, they take the easy way out.

FRANKIE

I'll ignore that comment. They have a big toy factory in the back of their house and hundreds of little elves work for him making toys and candy.

AARON

Elves? He's taking advantage of them because they're vertically challenged. He thinks he can abuse the little people.



SANTA DOES A MITZVAH

STAGE WRITE

FRANKIE

No he doesn't.

AARON

And are they held there against their will? Does he make them work hard hours and treat them really badly? Does he run a sweat shop? Because that's illegal and if you know this, I think you should report it.

FRANKIE

Of course not. It's not like that at all. Let me give you a job description. They wake up whenever they want, Santa provides room and board free of charge of course. Then they proceed to making toys. When they get tired of that they eat candy and play the rest of the day. Wouldn't you want that job?

AARON

Seems a little too intellectually lax for me.

FRANKIE

Aaron, you're my best friend and I love you like a cousin but trust me, even your little genius mind isn't too smart for this kind of treatment. This is definitely an offer even you couldn't refuse.

AARON

I'm not a hedonist. My sole purpose in life isn't pleasure. And how did you become such an expert on Santa Claus and his employees?

FRANKIE

My grandma. She taught me everything I need to know.

AARON

Frankie, it's the biggest bunch of bologna I've heard in a long time. I don't know why you believe her.

FRANKIE

Aaron, why would my grandma lie to me? Huh? What's she get out of it? Nothing. And the way I see it, if she's not getting anything out of it, she must be telling the truth.

AARON

Well how did she acquire all of this information?

FRANKIE

She's been around for a while. When she was a little kid, back when her hair was still black, she would write Santa Claus letters. It worked for her so she passed on the secret. First to my dad and my uncles, and then to me. Santa Claus is legendary. I'm talking over a thousand years. He was a bishop in the East. I don't mean Connecticut. I mean East as in all those ancient places that are now the Middle East. Then I think he moved to Holland. That's where he learned to climb down the chimney.

SANTA DOES A MITZVAH



STAGE WRITE

AARON

Hold on. He climbs down the chimney?

FRANKIE

Of course.

AARON

I've seen those guys in the mall. They're no toothpicks.

FRANKIE

They can't do it. But Santa Claus can because he's Santa Claus. Remember in "Alice in Wonderland" when Alice ate the candy and got smaller? I think he does that.

AARON

Don't you know anything? All of those candies that she ate, they're supposed to be drugs. Are you saying that Santa Claus is a junkie?

FRANKIE

Who told you that? Now, that's bologna if I've ever heard any. They're not drugs. They're magical substances that give you special powers. Like what he uses to make the reindeer fly.

AARON

Wait. Flying reindeer?

FRANKIE

Yeah. I think he picked that up in Scandinavia. That was before he settled in the North Pole.

AARON

Do animal rights activists know about this?

FRANKIE

(Ignoring him) There's something really special about him. You know what he has in his stomach? Strawberry jelly, you know, jam.

AARON

Jam in his stomach? That's outright stupid.

FRANKIE

No, it's the truth.

AARON

All right. Then where does he keep his food if his stomach is always stuffed with jelly? Answer me that.



SANTA DOES A MITZVAH

STAGE WRITE

FRANKIE

Well, I don't think his stomach is stuffed. It's probably just lined with jelly.

AARON

Have you seen any proof of this? Are there pictures of Santa's stomach in your father's medical books?

FRANKIE

No. But, you don't always need pictures for proof.

AARON

Frankie, I don't know why we're even discussing this. Elves, reindeer and climbing down chimneys? It's obvious that your Santa Claus is childish, immature fiction.

FRANKIE

Oh yeah? If he's not real, then why am I getting all the presents I want and all I gotta do is write him a letter. That's right. For the past six years.

AARON

Why does he do it?

FRANKIE

Huh?

AARON

Why does he do it? It's obviously a great financial loss.

FRANKIE

Aaron, your cynicism is going to kill you. Don't you see? Santa is one of the last great, selfless people alive. He does it because he likes to make children's lives a little brighter.

AARON

That's it?

FRANKIE

This man is awesome. Look, I'll make you a bet. I'll bet you my Mickey Mantle, God rest his soul, authentic 1956 autographed and spit in baseball glove that Santa Claus is for real. You write him a letter and find out for yourself that I'm not pulling your leg.

AARON

Well, I've never been a gambling man by nature but seeing as the stakes are high, I'm in. Wait a minute. The Mickey Mantle baseball glove is your most prized possession. Only three people have ever layed hands on it since the Mick departed with it. Your father, you and your mother when she accidentally trashed it. That glove means the world to you.

SANTA DOES A MITZVAH



STAGE WRITE

FRANKIE

Exactly. So ask yourself, my friend, why would I give it up so easily?

AARON

You wouldn't. If you're wagering so much, what do you want me to put up if I should lose?

FRANKIE

Oh, let me think. How about that gold coin from India? The one with the belly dancer on it.

AARON

Now I know you are definitely pulling my leg. That thing isn't worth a dime.

FRANKIE

Don't be so sure. Gold, my boy, is worth the world.

AARON

It was probably spray-painted.

FRANKIE

I don't think so, but that's not the point. To me, the only thing that matters is that you see I'm being straight with you. The worst thing in the world, Aaron, is when a man loses his credibility. That's a very important thing you know.

AARON

Who told you that?

FRANKIE

My Uncle Sal whispered it to me just as the cops were taking him off to the slammer.

AARON

That's beautiful. So are we doing this bet or what?

FRANKIE

Absolutely. You'll see. And afterwards you'll thank me. And I'll still have my Mickey Mantle ball glove and the golden belly dancer.

AARON

Frankie, call me crazy, call me insane, but I'm starting to believe you about this Santa Claus business. I mean why would you bet your glove? (Aaron starts pacing) You really think there is a way I could get a hold of him? And since I'm Jewish, will he ignore my humble request?

FRANKIE

Oh, Santa doesn't discriminate.



SANTA DOES A MITZVAH

STAGE WRITE

AARON

What about timing?

FRANKIE

Well, I normally get my letter in by the fifth. Early enough to have Santa double check that he got everything on my list. You never can be too careful about these things. But, my guess is that you could still get it in.

AARON

I understand. Frankie, there's one problem.

FRANKIE

What's that?

AARON

I bet if my mom found out, she'd be really upset. Since this Santa character isn't Jewish and I'm asking him for things, there could be a bit of a problem. What I'm saying is could your mom put the letter in the mail for me.

FRANKIE

What does my mom look like? A mailman? I think you're big enough to do this by yourself. Santa appreciates independent children. But what you should be worrying about right now is what the heck are you going to do when come Christmas Day, you have a load of presents by the chimney.

AARON

You let me worry about that. Would you help me write this letter? Is there a special format?

FRANKIE

Yeah, there is. Go get some paper.

AARON

(Aaron gets up and finds a paper and pen. He comes back and hands it to Frankie) Will you write it? I'll tell you what to say but you ought to write it. You have better penmanship.

FRANKIE

No. I'm not your secretary. I'll dictate. You start it off with "Dear Santa, I've been a really good boy this year."

AARON

Does he believe you?

SANTA DOES A MITZVAH



STAGE WRITE

FRANKIE

Sometimes. Sometimes he checks up on you. Generally, you don't want to lie. If he finds out you are lying, might as well forget it. Santa knows almost everything and he can find out what he doesn't know. He's kind of like my Uncle Lorenzo, he's got connections everywhere. You don't want to mess with Santa. Say you hit your sister. I don't mean hit as in a smack. I mean hit. If you hit your sister, you might as well forget writing to him.

AARON

Well, I've been a pretty good kid and I don't even have a sister.

FRANKIE

Yeah, Aaron. You shouldn't have a problem. Now write what you want.

AARON

(Aaron begins writing on the paper) Anything I want?

FRANKIE

That's right. Now hurry up. I don't have the rest of my life.

AARON

Frankie, I really don't know about this. I mean what if people find out? What if they hate me for this? If Rabbi Hershel were to find out, that would be the end of it.

FRANKIE

Rabbi Hershel? Aaron, how old is Rabbi Hershel?

AARON

I'm not sure. He's older than my dad but younger than my grandma.

FRANKIE

So, it's safe to say that he's old?

AARON

Yes.

FRANKIE

Now I know what your concern is.

AARON

You do?

FRANKIE

Of course. You're worried that your rabbi is going to get upset because you got toys, right?



SANTA DOES A MITZVAH

STAGE WRITE

AARON

That's right.

FRANKIE

He's going to get mad because you got toys and he didn't.

AARON

No, that's not it!

FRANKIE

Yes it is. Let me tell you something, Aaron. Old men, they go through something weird. They want to be young again. Naturally, they want to play with toys too. So, if your rabbi makes a big deal about your new gifts you tell him he ought to be ashamed of himself. He should grow up and stop running away from reality. He's old and decrepit and he has to learn to cope with it.

AARON

I don't think that's a problem. Frankie, the rabbi is a strict guy.

FRANKIE

Let me tell you something, these men of the cloth are much more preoccupied with other things. Besides, why would Rabbi Hershel find out about it? I'm not telling anyone. Are you?

AARON

No, but I'm just saying I think I could get in a lot of trouble.

FRANKIE

Trouble? Would I do something to deliberately get you in trouble?

AARON

Yes. Remember what happened last time?

FRANKIE

What happened? Nothing happened. It was just a little accident we had there. But you know, nothing serious happened.

AARON

Frankie, we broke Mr. Leon's store window and then he almost killed us with his broom.

FRANKIE

Well, the guy was upset. Wouldn't you be if some kids threw a rock in your store window?

SANTA DOES A MITZVAH



STAGE WRITE

AARON

Yes, I would. But you told me he wouldn't mind because he was planning to replace it anyway.

FRANKIE

And he was. Just not til later.

AARON

A lot later.

FRANKIE

A couple months give or take a few. It was no big deal. Anyway, my uncle took care of it. Just trust me on this one.

AARON

All right. I'm putting down a fishing pole, a remote control race car, and "The Complete Works of Albert Camus."

FRANKIE

That's more like it. Except for one thing. Santa doesn't do literature. He's a toy manufacturer, not a bookstore owner.

AARON

He doesn't do literature? What does that mean? Is he illiterate or something?

FRANKIE

Think about it, Aaron. How could he possibly be illiterate if half his job constitutes reading millions of letters? Of course he can read. He just doesn't do literature. I guess he doesn't have any friends in book retail.

AARON

Fair enough. I'll just substitute that for a train set. Nothing spectacular, something simple. Hear it goes. (Writing the letter) Dear Santa, I've been a really good boy this year. I would like a fishing pole, a remote control race car and an elementary train set, please.

FRANKIE

Politeness, that's good.

AARON

I think you're a swell guy. I like your clothes.

FRANKIE

No. Take those last two lines out. Buttering up is a sign of concealment. If you're trying to make someone feel really good with cheap compliments, it means you've done something wrong and you're trying to hide it.



SANTA DOES A MITZVAH

STAGE WRITE

AARON

Fine. So, I'll just cross that out. I conclude the letter with my address and a thank you. Does that work?

FRANKIE

Absolutely. (Frankie takes the letter, folds it and addresses it). You make sure this goes in the mail first thing tomorrow. You might even want to consider FedExing it. Well, I better get going. I promised my grandmother I'd help her make cannelloni for dinner tonight. Spinach. I hate spinach. But she's making me learn how to cook. She's worried that my wife's going to be a bad cook.

AARON

Wife? You're eight. You've never even had a girlfriend.

FRANKIE

I know but my dad says she's too old to realize that. He says I should just play along. I don't mind though because he slips me a five every so often.

AARON

He's paying you off?

FRANKIE

Hey, even I've got to make a living somehow. See you later. (Frankie walks towards the door)

AARON

Thanks, Francesco, you're a real pal.

FRANKIE

That's what I'm here for, buddy.

END OF SCENE

**AUTO
BY TODD PETERS**



S T A G E W R I T E

Scene One

Characters: DERRIK, a 15-year-old boy
 KARA, Derrik's mother

Setting: Time—a hot, summer afternoon
 Place—Inside Kara's car

At rise: Kara is driving to the supermarket. Derrik is in the passenger seat.

DERRIK

That's not true.

KARA

Yes, Derrik. You're right. I'm wrong as usual.

DERRIK

Why do you do that all the time? You know it doesn't do any good.

KARA

I don't know how else to deal with you. I don't know what you want from me.

DERRIK

So you just say "you're right" and hope that giving up will keep me quiet.

KARA

Let's just drop the subject and talk about something pleasant.

DERRIK

Whenever I'm mad or upset about something, you decide that we should have a pleasant conversation.

KARA

Look, I asked you nicely the first time and if you don't stop I will not be as nice the second time.

DERRIK

I'm willing to take the risk.

KARA

(Getting angry) Case Closed!



AUTO

STAGE WRITE

DERRIK

You always say what you want to say and then before I get a chance you close the case.

KARA

Don't you ever quit?

DERRIK

Never!

KARA

(Stiffly, as if trying to keep control) Look, I have to get some groceries. Will you make me a list?

DERRIK

I guess (She hands him her purse. He takes out a tablet and a pen) Go ahead.

KARA

Peanut butter.

DERRIK

Peanut butter. (Pause) You know I wasn't even thinking about the steam when I took a shower.

KARA

That's just the point. You don't think when it comes to the rest to the family. Two percent milk.

DERRIK

Milk. (Pause) What do you think? I planned it? Yeah, that's it. I said to myself, "I know, I'll go home and I'll just pretend to be hot and sticky, and then I'll take a shower just so my father will get mad and start punching holes in the wall."

KARA

(Again stiffly) Colored pens.

DERRIK

What for?

KARA

For your sister.

DERRIK

Why can't she use crayons?



STAGE WRITE

KARA

She can use colored pens if she wants. You're always picking on that poor kid, it's none of your business whether she uses crayons or colored pens or chalk or some mud and a stick.

DERRIK

You are constantly sticking up for her.

KARA

Oh that's not true and you know it.

DERRIK

Did she ask for colored pens?

KARA

(Pause) None of your business.

DERRIK

See, she didn't.

KARA

She needs colored pens.

DERRIK

Yeah, well, I need a new violin but I don't see you running out to get me one.

KARA

Well it's funny. I don't see any colored pens at Ralphs for 2000 bucks.

DERRIK

How do you expect me to make anything out of myself if I don't have the proper materials?

KARA

You have a perfectly good violin!

DERRIK

I have a violin designed for a three year old who is taking lessons because his mother is making him.

KARA

I've been waiting 10 years for new furniture, your violin can wait.

DERRIK

You see, you support Jill in what she does but you don't support what I do.



AUTO

STAGE WRITE

KARA

Oh, I guess that's why I drive you to rehearsal after rehearsal and come to recital after recital.

DERRIK

Yeah, but then you use it against me later when you want something out of me.

KARA

That's not true.

DERRIK

Nothing I say ever is.

KARA

Jill has it tougher than you do.

DERRIK

See, you're supportive of her because she's overweight and she's the youngest. You're supportive of Dad because he's your husband. Dad's supportive of you because you're a fellow adult, and Jill's supportive of everyone in the world except me.

KARA

You're so neglected.

DERRIK

(Sheepishly) What else?

KARA

Chicken.

DERRIK

Again?

KARA

Chicken!

DERRIK

(Giving in) Chicken.

KARA

Mild cheese.

DERRIK

Cheese. (Out of habit) I'm sorry I made you mad.

AUTO



STAGE WRITE

KARA

That's what you always say, but you still don't care about us.

DERRIK

You know, we would get along a lot better if you would...

KARA

It's always someone else. Why don't you let a problem start with you for a change?

DERRIK

(He is left speechless but tries to save himself) It isn't either of our faults. We just have opposite personalities. I wouldn't get along with you even if you were a regular person.

KARA

(Sadly) And just what kind of person am I, Derrik?

DERRIK

(Softly) Do you need anything else?

KARA

Spackling.

DERRIK

What for?

KARA

To patch the hole in my wall. (Derrik puts his head in his hand. Mom parks the car and gets out)

END OF SCENE



THE HAIRPIECE

BY GEORGE C. WOLFE

STAGE WRITE

from the play *The Colored Museum*

The lights reveal an emotionally distraught, totally bald black Woman sitting before a mirror, applying makeup, trying to pull herself together. On her dresser are two wigs, an Afro wig circa 1968 and a long, flowing wig.

The wig stand holding the Afro wigs opens her eyes. Her name is Janine. She stares in disbelief as the bald Woman continues to apply makeup.

JANINE

(Calling to the other wig stand) LaWanda. LaWanda girl wake up.

(The other wig stand, the one with the long, flowing wig, opens her eyes. Her name is LaWanda.)

LAWANDA

What? What is it?

JANINE

Check out girlfriend.

LAWANDA

Oh girl I don't believe it.

JANINE

(Laughing) Just look at the poor thing, trying to paint some life onto that face of hers. You'd think by now she'd realize it's the hair. It's all about the hair.

LAWANDA

What hair! She ain't got no hair! She done fried, dyed, dechemicalized her stuff to death.

JANINE

And all that's left is that buck-naked scalp of hers, sittin up there apologizin for being odd-shaped and ugly.

LAWANDA

(Laughing with Janine) Girl stop!

JANINE

I ain't sayin nuthin but the truth.

LAWANDA AND JANINE

The sista is bald! (They laugh)

JANINE

And all over some man.

THE HAIRPIECE



STAGE WRITE

LAWANDA

I tell ya girl I just don't understand it. I mean look at her. She's got a right nice face, a good head on her shoulders. A good job even. And she's got to go fall in love with that fool.

JANINE

That political quick-change artist. Every time the brother went and changed his ideology, she went and changed her hair to fit the occasion.

LAWANDA

Well at least she's breaking up with him.

JANINE

Hunny no!

LAWANDA

Yes child.

JANINE

Oh girl dish me the dirt!

LAWANDA

Well you see, I heard her on the phone, talking to one of her girlfriends and she's meeting him for lunch today to give him the ax.

JANINE

Well it's about time.

LAWANDA

I hear ya. But don't worry girl, I'll tell you about it.

JANINE

Hunny you won't have to tell me a darn thing 'cause I'm gonna be there. Front. Row. Center.

LAWANDA

You?

JANINE

Yes child, she's wearing me to lunch.

LAWANDA

(Outraged) I don't think so!

JANINE

(With an attitude) What do you mean, you don't think so?



THE HAIRPIECE

STAGE WRITE

LAWANDA

Exactly what I said, “I don’t think so.” Darn Janine get real. How the hell is she gonna wear both of us?

JANINE

She ain’t wearing both of us. She’s wearing me.

LAWANDA

Says who?

JANINE

Says me. Says her. Ain’t that right, girlfriend? (The Woman stops putting on makeup, looks around, sees no one and goes back to her makeup) I said ain’t that right! (The Woman picks up the phone)

WOMAN

Hello . . . Hello . . .

JANINE

Did you hear the damn phone ring?

WOMAN

No.

JANINE

Then put the damn phone down and talk to me.

WOMAN

I ah . . . don’t understand.

JANINE

It ain’t deep so don’t panic. Now, you’re having lunch with your boyfriend, right?

WOMAN

(Breaking into tears) I think I’m having a nervous breakdown.

JANINE

I said you’re having lunch with your boyfriend, right!

WOMAN

(Scared, pulling herself together) Yes right . . . right.

JANINE

To break up with him.

THE HAIRPIECE



STAGE WRITE

WOMAN

How did you know that?

LAWANDA

I told her.

WOMAN

(Stands and screams) Help! Help!

JANINE

Sit down! (A beat) I said sit your butt down! (The Woman sits)
Now set her straight and tell her you're wearing me.

LAWANDA

She's the one that needs to be set straight, so go on and tell her you're wearing me.

JANINE

No, tell her you're wearing me (There is a pause)

LAWANDA

Well?

JANINE

Well?

WOMAN

I ah . . . actually hadn't made up my mind.

JANINE

(Going off) What do you mean you ain't made up your mind! After all that fool has put you through,
you gonna need all the attitude you can get and there is nothing like attitude and a healthy head of
kinks to make his stuff shrivel like it should!

That's right! When you wearin me, you letting him know he ain't gonna get no sweet-talkin comb
through your love without some serious resistance. No-no! The kink of my head is like the kink of
your heart and neither is about to be hot-pressed into surrender.

LAWANDA

That stuff is so tired. The last time attitude worked on anybody was 1968. Janine girl, you need to get
over it and get on with it. (To the Woman) And *you* need to give the brother a goodbye he will never
forget. I say give him hysteria! Give him emotion! Give him rage! And there is nothing like a toss of
the tresses to make your emotional outburst shine with emotional flair. You can toss me back, shake me



THE HAIRPIECE

STAGE WRITE

from side to side, all the while screaming, “I want you out of my life *forever!!!*” And not only will I come bouncing back for more, but you just might win an Academy Award for best performance by a head of hair in a dramatic role.

JANINE

Miss Hunny please! She don’t need no Barbie doll dipped in chocolate telling her what to do. She needs a head of hair that’s coming from a fo’ real place.

LAWANDA

Don’t you dare talk about nobody coming from a “fo’ real place,” Miss Made-in-Taiwan!

JANINE

Hey! I ain’t ashamed of where I come from, O.K. Besides, it don’t matter where you come from as long as you end up in the right place.

LAWANDA

And it don’t matter the grade as long as the point gets made. So go on and tell her you’re wearing me.

JANINE

No, tell her you’re wearing me.

LAWANDA

Set the fool straight.

JANINE

Who you callin a fool? Why if I had hands I’d knock you clear into next week. You think you cute. She thinks she’s cute just ‘cause that synthetic mop of hers blows in the wind. She looks like a fool and you look like an even bigger fool when you wear her, so go on and tell her you’re wearing me. Go on, tell her! Tell her! Tell her!

LAWANDA

(Simultaneously) Let her know there is no way she could even begin to compete with me. I am quality. She is kink. I am exotic. She is common. I am class and she is trash.

That’s right. T-R-A-S-H. We’re talking three strikes and you’re out. So go on and tell her you’re wearing me. Go on, tell her! Tell her! Tell her!

(The Woman pulls the two wigs off the wig stands. All three scream as the lights go to black on three bald heads.)

End of scene

In the above scene, several words have been changed with the author’s permission.

For more information on *The Colored Museum*, the entire script, or copyright information, contact Grove/Atlantic, Inc., New York City.

SARAH'S MONOLOGUE

BY PATRICIA LOUGHREY



STAGE WRITE

This is a monologue from a play for young people called *The Inner Circle*. Patricia Loughrey wrote *The Inner Circle* in the early 1980's, when the AIDS virus was beginning to gain attention in the United States. In the first published edition of the play, a high school student recalls her first meeting with a dear friend who has recently died from the disease.

SARAH

(A high school classroom. She speaks
to the audience.)

I met him in seventh grade. I was shy because we'd moved from a really small town and I felt sort of backwards. On the first day of school I showed up in overalls. And I was so proud because I'd embroidered all summer and the back was this huge butterfly. What a jerk. But Mark was always nice to me. He always treated me like a person and he didn't have to. I mean he was on the "A" baseball team and he didn't have to say a word to me. But he always did. I used to draw ponies. I was pretty good. I made little voices for them and I wrote their conversations in little bubbles over their heads. Dumb stuff like, "Come friend, share my oats." One time the guy behind me in Spanish class grabbed my notebook. It was full of ponies and he started passing it around the class. The kids were real quiet and they passed it up and down the rows and I couldn't get it because it was during a record. We were supposed to be listening to this record. But when it got to Mark, he didn't even look at it. He just put it under his notebook and sat there. The kid behind him was poking him to pass it on. I could see him poking him. But he just sat there. At the end of class he brought my notebook over and handed it to me and walked out the door.

For more information on *The Inner Circle*, the entire script, or copyright information, contact Baker's Plays, Quincy, MA.

TWELVE-LINE SCENE

BY JASON



STAGE WRITE

Characters: A, a customer
B, a store clerk

Setting: A grocery store, present day

At rise: Customer walks up to grocery store counter

Hey, where's the yogurt? A

Uh, over there, I think. B

Oh. Thanks. A

Sure. B

(Looks around) Sir, I'm not seeing it. A

Oh. B

Well, aren't you going to help? A

Uh, back spasm. B

Then why are you working here? A

Don't know. B

Where's your manager? A

Speaking. B



RHYTHM SCENE BY LAUREN

STAGE WRITE

(Note: You can see the influence on this writer of *The Hairpiece*, one of the model scenes in the Student Notebook.)

Characters: A, a peach
B, a peach tree

Setting: In the orchard, afternoon

At rise: The peach tree is asleep and the peach is awake.

Here comes Ann! 1A

(Wakes up) Hey! I was sleeping. 2B

(Swinging back and forth) Ann, pick me! 3A

Swinging...makes...me...dizzy... 4B

(Looks around) Where did Ann go? 5A

Settle down! 6B

Ann! I'm ripe now! 7A

Face it. She's gone. 8B

(Sadly) She never picks me. 9A

Well, you're the smallest. 10B

But I'm the best. 11A

RHYTHM SCENE



STAGE WRITE

(Grumpy) You woke me up.	12B
It was important!	13A
My sleep is important.	14B
I am more important.	15A
You grew from me!	16B
But I am food.	17A
But you are small.	18B
I'll grow big soon!	19A
How soon is that?	20B
Real soon!	21A
Soon enough?	22B
Yeah!	23A
I'm sleepy.	24B
Then, sleep.	25A
I can't.	26B



RHYTHM SCENE

STAGE WRITE

Why not?	27A
You're loud!	28B
Am not.	29A
Are too.	30B
(Nervously) Shhh!	31A
What?	32B
Ann!	33A
Where?	34B
(Points) There! But, I'm the best.	35A
Oh.	36B
Ann! Pick me! I am the juiciest! The best! The ripest! The freshest! Better than all the peaches!	37A
The smallest! The most worthless! The greenest! The most sour! Stop dreaming, Peach. Ann wants only the best. You're not the best.	38B
I am not the most worthless.	39A
Well, what are you worth?	40B

RHYTHM SCENE



STAGE WRITE

41A

One and a half juicy bites.

42B

Only one and a half?

43A

Hey, it's more than one.

44B

I guess you are worth something.

45A

(Resigned) But I am so small.

46B

You'll grow.

47A

Yeah, right.

48B

You're great.

49A

Am not.

50B

Are too.



I GOT ONE BY LEVI

STAGE WRITE

Scene One

Characters: GRANDPA, 69 years old, likes to fish
JOSH, 13 years old, athletic

Setting: In a “work shed” on a 300-acre Wyoming farm. It’s evening.

At Rise: Grandpa is cleaning the shed as Josh walks into the shed.

JOSH

(Josh bursts in the door, but forgets to shut it.) Hey Grandpa! How are you feeling?

GRANDPA

Hey’s for horses. And I’m feelin’ with my hands.

JOSH

Grandpa, guess what. I got an A+ on my year-end test. And when I went fishing with my friends I caught a fish!

GRANDPA

Lots of people catch fish. Shut the door.

JOSH

So, what are you doing? (Josh walks over and shuts the door.)

GRANDPA

I’m cleanin’ up, what’s it look like?

JOSH

Can I help?

GRANDPA

Nope.

JOSH

How come?

GRANDPA

Cause, ya’ll mess everythin’ up.

JOSH

Well, okay maybe I’ll do something else.

I GOT ONE



STAGE WRITE

GRANDPA

Make sure that ya don't mess nothin' up.

JOSH

No problem. (As he says this he walks across the room, trips over a fishing pole, and spills a box full of old nuts and bolts.) Oops, sorry Grandpa.

GRANDPA

HEY, watch out, look what ya did, yer messin' everthin' up! (Grandpa glares at Josh and then goes on with what he is doing.)

JOSH

(Josh picks up a knife lying on the floor.) Wow, this is neat.

GRANDPA

Hey, put that down 'fore ya cut yerself.

JOSH

What are you going to do tomorrow?

GRANDPA

What's it matter to you?

JOSH

I was just wondering.

GRANDPA

Well, I'll probably go fishin'.

JOSH

Hey grandpa, sorry about messing everything up.

GRANDPA

(He starts mumbling to himself and then says) Yea whatever. (Silence) Ya want ta go fishin' tommora'?

JOSH

Can I?

GRANDPA

Ya I guess so. Ya better get yer stuff ready.

JOSH

Okay, thanks grandpa.



I GOT ONE

STAGE WRITE

GRANDPA

Stop acting' dumb or I won't take ya.

JOSH

Okay (Josh runs out of the shed)

GRANDPA

(Grandpa starts talking to himself.) Clumsy kid...he'll probably just get in the way and knock stuff over. I can't believe grandma talked me into letting him come.

END OF SCENE



Scene Two

Characters: GRANDPA
JOSH

Setting: Walking together through a forest and field in Wyoming. Time is 6 a.m.

At rise: They are walking to Grandpa's favorite fishing hole. Josh and Grandpa are both carrying their fishing gear.

JOSH

(As Josh and Grandpa are walking they start talking. They have just left the house.) Hey Grandpa, thanks for taking me fishing with you!

GRANDPA

SHH!! Yer goin' to scare all the critters away.

JOSH

(Josh speaks in a whisper.) Ooops sorry, how far is this fishing hole?

GRANDPA

Um, just round the crick a ways...look out for that ol'stump there.

JOSH

(Still in a whisper) Thanks for the warning. Is it good fishing at that fishing spot?

GRANDPA

Speak up, ya don't have to whisper! Yea it's perty good fishin' in that fishin' hole. I caught some perty big whoppers down there.

JOSH

(In a normal voice) Wow! How big were they?

GRANDPA

I reckon they was about eight or nine pounds. They sure made a good dinner!

JOSH

Hey is this the spot we are going to go fishing? (Josh points to a stream with fish swimming in it.) Woeee look at those fish. What kind are they?

GRANDPA

Them are salmon, and they is good eaten, but the spot where we're goin' fishin' is up the stream yonder.

JOSH

Are the fish bigger there?



I GOT ONE

STAGE WRITE

GRANDPA

Yull see. (After walking a bit farther they come to an open spot on the stream.) This is it right here.

JOSH

(Josh and Grandpa start unpacking their supplies.) Hey Grandpa, I don't see any fish.

GRANDPA

That's a good sign, cause they're all under them rocks hidin', waitin' for food. Means they're hungry.

JOSH

What kind of bait should I use?

GRANDPA

Flies or live bait! That's all they eat.

JOSH

What kind of live bait?

GRANDPA

Crawdads, frogs, shad, or grub.

JOSH

I'll try a fly. What are you going to try?

GRANDPA

I guess I'll try a worm. Oh...and they're crazy for cheese. I brought some. I'm glad we won't be home 'till night.

JOSH

Why?

GRANDPA

Cause this was yer grandma's cheese an she'll be madder than a hornet when she finds out.

JOSH

Oh. (They tie hooks on and Grandpa puts his worm on his hook.) How should I cast, Grandpa?

GRANDPA

Cast it up stream a ways and let it float down stream. I'm just going to cast straight out and let the bait sit there.

JOSH

(They continue fishing for a while with no luck.) Hey I think I got something!

GRANDPA

Play it nice and easy. Let him tire hisself out.

I GOT ONE



STAGE WRITE

JOSH

(Paying no heed to Grandpa's warning, Josh jerks his pole up. Luckily he doesn't lose the fish.) Can you tell what it is?

GRANDPA

Nope, reel 'im in slow! (Grandpa is starting to get a little excited.)

JOSH

Oh no! I lost him. At least I got my fly back. Maaan...

GRANDPA

Hey don't worry bout it. It happens to me all the time.

JOSH

Really?

GRANDPA

Yep, I think it happens to just 'bout everyone.

JOSH

Good. Too bad I lost it though.

GRANDPA

(After a few minutes) Well, you ready for some lunch?

JOSH

Ya, I guess so. (They get their lunches out.)

GRANDPA

I'm glad ya came. I didn't want to invite you at first cause I figured you would just get in the way, but your grandma said I should take you along.

JOSH

Yea, a lot of kids seem to think the same thing. Do you know how maybe I could get some more friends?

GRANDPA

Yep, think 'bout stuff for ya do um.

JOSH

What?

GRANDPA

I said, think 'bout stuff for you do um.



I GOT ONE

STAGE WRITE

JOSH

Oh is that like look before you leap?

GRANDPA

Yep.

JOSH

Oh. Well how do I do that?

GRANDPA

We'll pay more attention to what's happenin' 'round ya.

JOSH

I'll try.

GRANDPA

(They have already eaten their lunch.) Well let's get back to fishin' now.

JOSH

Okay.

GRANDPA

I guess I'll try some worms too. They seem to be working pretty good.

JOSH

(It's now dusk. After fishing for a while Josh lets out an excited cry.) Got one!

GRANDPA

Take it easy this time.

JOSH

Okay! (After a fight with the fish, Josh finally pulls it onto the bank.) Whew, glad I didn't lose this one! How much do you think it weighs, Grandpa?

GRANDPA

Oh...I'd say 'bout four or five pounds.

JOSH

Wow! That's the biggest fish I ever got!!

GRANDPA

Let's hurry and get yer line back in the water. The fish start biting more at dusk!

JOSH

Okay!

I GOT ONE



STAGE WRITE

GRANDPA

I think I got one.

JOSH

Wow!

GRANDPA

Here he comes. (With ease, Grandpa flips the fish out of the stream)

JOSH

Whoa! That's a big fish, (Josh accidentally knocks the fish back in the water after his Grandpa pulled the hook out of the fish.) Oh no, I'm sorry. I'm rea...

GRANDPA

What's the matter with you? You lose yer head or what? That could 'ave been a record fish!

JOSH

Grandpa, why can't I ever please you? What do you expect from me? How can I be your friend? That's all I want. To be your friend.

GRANDPA

I don't know, Josh. Your dad used to ask the same thing. He was just like you. Well, let's get 'goin. Ain't no fun.

JOSH

(As they pack up their gear, Josh, with a tear in his eye, wonders if he will always be messing things up. He starts thinking to himself.) If only I hadn't been so clumsy. I should pay more attention to what I'm doing. I'm a total... Wait a minute. This isn't my fault! It's Grandpa's. He freaked out over a fish, we went for fun. I apologized... I was nice to him, I said I was sorry... Well, I guess he was just disappointed. If I had lost that fish, I would have been upset too, and I would have blamed someone else too. But he didn't have to yell at me, or get so upset. Whose fault was it? I think it was entirely his fault... wait a minute, now I'm being like him, blaming him for something that wasn't his fault. Well I don't know what to think. He's probably wondering the same thing himself.

I guess it was both our faults. It was my fault that the fish got knocked into the water, but it was his fault that we aren't having fun right now. I guess the best thing to do, is to apologize. Maybe I'll apologize in the morning. (Josh walks off into the darkness with a darkness in his heart.)

END OF SCENE



I GOT ONE

STAGE WRITE

Scene Three

Characters: GRANDPA
JOSH

Setting: In the work shed, 4:45 p.m.

At rise: Grandpa is sitting in the shed. Josh knocks on the door and then opens it. Grandpa is arranging his fishing gear.

JOSH

Hey Grandpa, can I come in?

GRANDPA

I guess if ya want to.

JOSH

Hey Grandpa, thanks for taking me fishing with you yesterday! I had a lot of fun.

GRANDPA

Yea I am still mad 'bout losin' that fish though.

JOSH

I'm really sorry about what happened.

GRANDPA

Well did you learn yer less'n?

JOSH

Yea, I guess so, but I'm still not sure how I can fix my problem.

GRANDPA

Well like I told ya, ya need to watch what yer doin'. Ya know sometimes ya really get on my nerves. And that's when I over'eact. Right now I'm still feeling that way.

JOSH

What do you mean?

GRANDPA

I mean that you should quit botherin' me right now.

JOSH

Grandpa, please, can't we just be friends?



STAGE WRITE

GRANDPA

I said quit botherin' me.

JOSH

Just before I came in here I talked to Grandma, and she suggested that I should try to talk to you about my problems. So I did. I came in here and tried to get along with you. But instead of you listening to me and trying to solve the problem, you just brought up the subject of losing the fish again. Can't you be reasonable about it and try to solve this problem instead of making me feel worse? (Josh waits a minute for a response, however Grandpa acts like he's ignoring him, and continues sorting the fishing gear. Josh continues on.) When I was talking to Grandma she said you would probably understand—and that we could resolve our problems. But apparently Grandma was wrong. I guess you aren't going to talk over our problem, are you?

GRANDPA

Ya know what Josh? Yer father used to ask me the same question. I guess ya both have the same problem, don't ya?

JOSH

You know what I think? I think maybe we aren't the problem. Did you ever stop to wonder if maybe you were causing the problem?

GRANDPA

Maybe you should leave now, and think over what you said. When yer ready to apologize you can come back in.

(Josh slowly heads toward the door and goes outside. Grandpa begins to talk to himself.)

I can't believe that kid had the nerve to talk back to me. If I had been him I would of got whooped good by my pa. That kid...I guess maybe I should have been easier on him than that. I was kind of hard on him. I was the same way with my son. I wonder if I can ever be cured. (Grandpa starts to have second thoughts) Wait a minute, why am I blaming myself for what he did? If he hadn't knocked that fish in the water, this whole thing wouldn't be happenin'. I guess we're all imperfect though. I remember havin' a similar conversation with my grandpa. I think our family is goin' to be the same way unless I change the course of things. I guess I better go find him.

JOSH

(Outside the shed, thinking to himself.) What's wrong with him? Why does he have to be so mean? I guess that I should have been more agreeable though. I can't believe I blew up at Grandpa. If someone doesn't change this then we're goin' to be mad at each other forever. I guess I better go back and talk with Grandpa. (Knocks on shed door)

GRANDPA

(Grandpa hears the knock just as he is about to go apologize to Josh.) Come in.



I GOT ONE

STAGE WRITE

JOSH

I came back to apologize. I've been thinking. We had better get along or else we aren't ever going to get along with each other.

GRANDPA

Josh, this goes back farther than just us. I remember a similar situation that I had with my grandpa. I guess we had better get along or else you might act the same way with your grandchildren.

JOSH

Well how about we start over then? Is that ok with you?

GRANDPA

Yep that's fine with me.

JOSH

Hey Grandpa, thanks for taking me fishing with you! I had fun!

GRANDPA

Sure, no problem. I had fun too. But, I was sort of disappointed when I lost my fish. I guess that I overreacted though. I'm really sorry. Ya want to help me arrange my fishing gear?

JOSH

Sure I'll help you, and I'm sorry about what happened too. I should have been careful. I wish it had turned out better.

GRANDPA

Well, let's try to forget what happened and be pardners...ok?

JOSH

Ok. (Grandpa and Josh shake hands)

GRANDPA

Hey, ya want to hand me that ther hook? That goes with these hooks over here.

JOSH

Sure here you go. (Josh hands the hook to his Grandpa.)

END OF PLAY

THE LABORATORY REVENGE BY TUCKER



STAGE WRITE

Scene One

Characters: 007, a white laboratory mouse, sneaky, curious and very bright
630, a white laboratory mouse, over tested and skittish and stutters.
COMPUTER VOICE, very loud, slow and ominous

Setting: Time—Late at night
Place—A medical laboratory with laboratory animals in cages all around.

At rise: 007 and 630 are hiding in a kick space corner of the lab. They have just escaped from their cages.

007

Whew! We finally made it.

630

Made it? What are you talking about? Aren't we still in the lab?

007

So! This is the fun part. You stay here, and I'll climb to the counter to see what the humans are doing.
(007 exits)

630

No! Where did he go? (Turning around, shaking, and whimpering) I'm no spy! What do I do? I see a foot! Oh no, not the humans! I can't bear what the jerks have put me through. All those needles! All the shock waves! All just so they can look beautiful. And they call themselves *humane*!

007

(Whistles and yells out from off stage) Hey! 630 Up here!!! The ignorant humans are gone! They left all these machines on. What fools!

630

(In tears) I just saw a foot. Did they see you?

007

(Sees a computer screen) Shut up! Not now! I see something. This is incredible. It has a huge screen with letters and numbers on it. Wow! It's beautiful. It has...well some kind of board with squares and numbers. (Sees a computer mouse) This is interesting. It's something about our size that says "mouse" on it. Let me check it out. I'll be right back.

630

Not again!!!! Please come back. (Background sounds of human feet) Oh No! Is that the humans? 007 look out!!



THE LABORATORY REVENGE

STAGE WRITE

007

Stop your whining! Nobody is coming. (Thinking out loud) Wow! This is too good to be true!

630

(Hears monkeys shrieking in their cages) Oh no! The humans are coming back! Hide! Save yourself!

007

Calm down! It's just the monkeys! I'm trying to think.

630

(Angry) Mangy monkeys! How dare you! They have suffered just as much as you and I have. Maybe even more. Look 334 has no eyes. I think we should free him.

007

We will have time to free them later. But now back to our cause. Don't you remember?

630

I am not stupid. Yes I remember.

007

We are here to teach those ignorant fools a lesson. After we get done with them, those oblivious dullards won't test on any of us for a long time. Ha Ha Ha!

630

Ok! But after our mission, can we free the monkeys?

007

(Looking at the computer screen) Wow! What's this? Something called the internet? It says I can find out everything I need to know if I enter the access code.

630

I know! I know! How about Monkey?

007

Would you forget about the monkeys? Hey 630! I just thought of the access code! It's monkey.

630

(Sarcastic) Gee, where did you get an idea like that?

COMPUTER VOICE

Welcome to the information super highway!

THE LABORATORY REVENGE



STAGE WRITE

630

Humans! Help! Hide!

007

Come check this out! (Lights fade as 630 starts to climb up to the computer)

END OF SCENE



THE LABORATORY REVENGE

STAGE WRITE

Scene Two

Characters: 007
630
BURT, scientist
EDWARD, scientist

Setting: Time—The next morning
Place—A medical laboratory with laboratory animals in cages all around.

At rise: 007 is on the keyboard. 630 is looking on from the computer mouse.

007

(With awe) Wow! Can you believe this? I found out all about how to use this computer. These humans use it to store information, like books. But, you can write in them. 630! Look here! I found a Pentium processor 1000-9 9 24 XLT. Now look, this shows all of the laboratory information. It says that we can access all of the laboratory testing units and program them however we see fit.

630

(With horrified expression) Did you say testing? You know how I hate testing! They put me through a lot more than you! Needles the size of my tail poked into my eyes.

630

(Remembering the pain) They gave me some kind of burning eye drop before the needle. It burned so bad. Then I heard them laugh. One of the humans said, “Look at this pitiful little thing. I wonder if it can even feel the pain. Ha Ha Ha !” I sure did feel it. The drop sealed my eye completely. We will show them that we really do feel pain.

007

630, we’ve been all through this, but please stay with me! I’m so close to giving them a taste of their own medicine. There is only one thing to remember now - revenge! (Points to a button) That button over there turns on the electric animal testing chamber. If I set this voltage to the maximum setting, maybe they will learn about how much pain you have been through. It might just straighten their whiskers.

630

Straighten their whiskers! Is that all?

007

I know how you feel! My brain transplant didn’t exactly feel good. But, in a strange way I appreciate being superior. Now I am able to use some of the brain power they gave me against them. In this retaliation, I am not fighting just for myself. I am fighting for you.

THE LABORATORY REVENGE



STAGE WRITE

630

I know and....

007

(A giant hand lifts up 007) Help! Help they got me, where did they come from? 630!

630

(Hiding under keyboard) Hey! 007 can you hear me! (Whimpers) 007, where did they take you? Are You OK? Oh, 007 where are you? What do I do? (To himself) OK, pull yourself together. This is no time for stuttering. I must concentrate. What do I do? This whole time, I have been depending on him. Now he is gone. They must have taken him by surprise. They surely put him in that cage again. I'm sure he didn't see them coming. Now we know for sure the humans are back. I can hear them taking 007 away. This isn't fair. Where have they taken him? I can't stand the very thought of a human. They are so cruel and ugly. If I give up now, I'll be a failure. Every animal in this lab will keep on suffering. Our whole cause, to get humans to stop testing and torturing creatures will be lost. If I don't give up, and I try the plan without 007, I'll surely get caught. They would terminate me. If they do terminate me, it would be for my cause. 007 would be proud. It couldn't be any more painful than what I have already gone through. I know, I will do it myself. If only 007 could hear me now.

EDWARD

Hey Burt, I have dinner reservations with my wife tonight. Looks like everything is under control. Do you mind if I leave a little early?

BURT

No problem Ed. I'm just going to clean up the animal shock testing area.

EDWARD

Okay! But don't lock yourself in again! Ha Ha Ha!

BURT

It was an accident OK!

EDWARD

Bye.

END OF SCENE



THE LABORATORY REVENGE

STAGE WRITE

Scene Three

Characters: 007
630
BURT
COMPUTER VOICE

Setting: Time—Later that day
Place—The medical laboratory.

At rise: 630 is on keyboard.

630

What do I do? OK, I know. I have to set the voltage on high. 007 I need your help!

007

(Calling from offstage) Hey 630 over here! In the cage over here!

630

(Looking around) 007 is that you?

007

Yes it's me. Who do you think it is? One of the mangy monkeys? No time to talk! Can you hear me clearly?

630

Yes! But I don't know what to do? Can I just set you free?

007

No! We have no time for that! Just listen carefully. We have to hurry before Burt gets out of the electric animal testing chamber. Okay! You must...

630

(Interrupting in a nervous voice) Animal testing electric chamber!

007

(In a harsh tone) 630 get a hold of yourself. We have no time for your stuttering. Now just listen carefully and do exactly what I tell you. You must set the voltage on high. Do you think you will be able to reach it?

630

Yes! (Walks cautiously over to the voltage meter, looking over his shoulder)

THE LABORATORY REVENGE



STAGE WRITE

007

Okay! Good so far. Now all you must do is push down the red button. Wait, wait not so hasty. First, set the microphone on the computer so we can communicate with Burt. Then push. Hurry now.

630

(Runs back to computer and pushes button, then scurries over to voltage button, climbs on top and jumps up and down until a large click is heard.)

BURT

What the...(Sounds of electricity and flashes of light are seen) Ow, it burns!

630

(630 jumps from key to key to activate the computer voice. He types madly)

COMPUTER VOICE

Burt! Burt! How dare you take advantage of helpless animals! You have done horrible things, Burt!

BURT

Who's there?

COMPUTER VOICE

It's me your almighty Lloyd.

630

(Realizing his mistake) Oops... I spelled it wrong.

007

(From offstage) It's okay! You're doing great. Just keep going.

BURT

Who's Lloyd?

COMPUTER VOICE

Not Lloyd, you idiot, Lord. Now stop interrupting me and listen. Do you realize that animals have a nervous system? They feel pain. We know you know this. You are using these defenseless creatures just for your research. Just so you can be published in People Magazine. If you don't change your ways you will get more of this... (Sounds of electricity).

BURT

(Crying) I'm sorry! So sorry! Please, have mercy on me!



THE LABORATORY REVENGE

STAGE WRITE

COMPUTER VOICE

Mercy! You must be joking. You don't know what mercy means. Haven't you sat there laughing while poor lab mice were shaking uncontrollably with huge needles sticking in their eyes? This is your last chance.

BURT

Anything! Just please don't hurt me anymore.

COMPUTER VOICE

You will let all of the animals free! And teach the others the ways of the wisdom.

BURT

Okay! Okay! Okay! Whatever you say.

COMPUTER VOICE

Hurry up! Before I change my mind. (Offstage sounds of cages opening and animals stampeding are heard)

BURT

(Obviously shaken and scared) Save the earth! Free the animals! (Runs offstage)

007

(Runs onstage) Wow! 630 you did it! You saved our lives!

630

I knew you'd be proud.

THE END

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