



Student Playwrights Project Playwriting Workshop Lesson Plan Page 1

Goal: The goal is to introduce playwriting to students who have no experience with the form and to provide a playwriting master class to students who have playwriting experience that will guide them to winning the competition.

Objectives:

- The students will understand the difference between narrative writing and dialogue.
- The students will participate in and learn about a four-stage process of writing a play.
- The students will demonstrate an understanding of the concepts of beginning, middle, end, and obstacles.
- The students will explore character qualities.
- The students will discuss rewriting and revision considerations.
- The students will learn about how to format plays.

Students: Middle school and high school students

Class Length: Forty-five or ninety minutes

Materials:

- A short folk tale glued onto a postcard (three copies)
- Peanuts (one for each student)
- A character-profile map (one for each student)
- A sheet listing the four stages of playwriting (one for each student)



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- A playwriting map (one for each student)
- The “Ten-Minute-Play Considerations” handout (one for each student)
- A sample ten-minute play as a formatting example and for evaluation (one for each student)
- Arena giveaways (bookmarks, posters, etc.)

Introduction: (Three to five minutes)

Introduce the presenters and the Student Playwrights Project, and describe what the students will do in the workshop.

Warm-Up: Narrative Story Versus Playwriting (Ten minutes)

This exercise will illustrate the difference between narrative and dramatic writing.

Read the tale below to the students so that they are familiar with it. Ask one student to read it again (narrate) while two others act it out. The actors do not need to use any language; they simply do what the narrator reads. After the students perform, ask two other volunteers to act out the story without a narrator. They should use voice and action to communicate all of the important information from the story.

This will help illustrate to the students how writers can relay information through dialogue and action. Encourage them to avoid unnecessary narration.



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A Coyote Tale from the Pueblo Indians

Once, when the Earth was an empty and barren place, Thought Woman called on Coyote and asked for his help. “Coyote,” she said, “I want you to carry this satchel far to the south, and whatever you do, do not open it.” Coyote placed the satchel on his back and traveled through the desolate Earth for a long while. Eventually, he grew hungry, and there was no food around. Hoping to find a snack, Coyote took the satchel from his back and opened it. Immediately, bright, shining stars flew wildly out of the sack and straight up into the dark sky. Coyote was frightened. Thought Woman scolded Coyote, “Coyote, you have disobeyed me. From now on, you will suffer with a toothache and howl in agony all through the night.”

Main Instruction: Four Stages of Playwriting (Twenty minutes)

Stage 1: Finding Inspiration

The instructor describes the many places to find inspiration.

Example: Peanut Exercise

Each student draws a peanut out of a bag and examines it using all the senses (except taste). The leader side-coaches the following:

- Imagine that the peanut is a character in a story.



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- How did it get the markings it has?
- Is it damaged, or in good shape?
- Why is it the size it is?
- How old is it?
- Is it rich, or poor?
- Is it male, or female?
- What kind of house does it live in?
- What kind of job does it have?
- What does it do for fun?
- What kind of personality does it have?

The instructor then gives students a character profile to complete.

Character Profile

Name: _____ Age: _____

Family: _____

Habitat: _____

Job: _____

Greatest Wish or Need: _____

Greatest Fear: _____

Most Important or Special Being: _____



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Stage 2: Turning Inspiration into a Compelling Story

Write a story about the peanut character, who may have transformed into a human or may still be a peanut—either way is all right. The story should include the following elements:

- The character wants something.
- The character tries to get it.
- The character runs into a problem or obstacle.
- The character succeeds or fails to get what she or he wants.
- The character changes as a result of the effort.

Stage 3: Developing the Compelling Story into a Play (Seven minutes)

The instructor gives students the playwriting diagram so they can explore the general shape of a play: a beginning, a middle, a climax, and an end with a resolution.

Stage 4: Rewriting and Revision

The instructor will encourage students to look at a play as three dimensional rather than two dimensional. A play is meant to be performed by live actors. It is not meant to be read in silence. Recommend that students listen to plays read out loud by family members



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or friends. It is most helpful if someone other than the playwright reads out loud during these readings.

Students will receive the handout “Ten-Minute-Play Considerations.” The students will discuss this handout.

Students will also get a sample ten-minute play to use as an example of proper formatting and so they can view a winning play from a previous competition.

Lesson Closing (Three minutes)

The instructor will ask students to review questions and will hand out prizes for correct answers.

- Describe the difference between narrative writing and dramatic writing with dialogue.
- What must the main character overcome to obtain his or her greatest wish or need?
- Name three elements of a play. (Correct answers: beginning, middle, end, climax, resolution, character, action, plot)
- The instructor can also ask a question based on that day’s lesson.

Courtesy of the Arena Stage (arenastage.org)