

Playwriting



Level 3

Introduction

This is a fun project—you get to write a play! In plays, you have only the words and actions of your characters to move your plot along and show the hearts of your characters to the audience. A play is written to be seen and heard, so as you are planning, think of a way that your work can be performed, even in a very limited setting. Talk with your teacher about the following:

- * How long will your play be?
- * Will it be performed, and if so, how will the production of the play be worked out?

Prewriting

Work through these steps with your teacher.

- * Start by talking about the ways that people reveal what they are thinking through what they say or do. Go to a mirror and portray:
 - A person who is in a hurry
 - A person who is tired
 - A person who is worried
- * Note the things you did. Now, represent the same characteristics using only words. What *words* could convey the emotions above without actually *telling* the reader that you are hurried, tired, or worried? Keep practicing until you have the idea of “show, don’t tell.”
- * Next, talk with your teacher about the scope of the assignment. (You should probably write a detailed scene rather than a whole skit; you can simply tell your teacher the rest of the story.)
- * After you’ve defined the scope of the project, review the format of a typical script.
 - Look at any play you may have in print in your home.
 - Note the format. For instance, the character’s name is usually written at the left, and all his lines follow. Different actors’ lines are separated on the page with spaces.
 - Decide if you will narrate your play to your teacher as she types it or if you will handwrite it.
- * Now it’s time to work out the general plot of the scene (or play).
 - Use the standard Story Map (Grammar) supplement.
 - Think out a plot that has a good beginning, an interesting middle, and a sense of ending.
 - Remember that the whole plot is told by what actors say and do, so the story needs to be one that can be acted out by at least two actors. As with short story writing, keep the plot very simple; use a central idea and just a few characters whom the audience will get to know well.

Drafting

The simplest way for you to write this is to narrate your first draft to your teacher while she types.

- * Tell her what the characters do and say.
- * This phase may be accomplished in one session, or it may take several different ones.
- * After you have finished narrating, read your printed draft and mark any changes you want to make. An ideal way to do this is to read it aloud.

Editing

For this stage of the process, try to listen to others read your play aloud.

- * The actors don’t need to move at all; rather, do a “bench reading,” where everyone has a part (or two) and reads them aloud, putting intonation into the voice but not making any other movements.
- * You, the playwright, should listen to this bench reading with a script in hand and make notes on how it can be improved.

Polishing and Presenting

If you are going to produce this play, it *will* be polished as you rehears. Many details will come to your attention as actors attempt to deliver the lines. Be sure to have lots of fun putting on your play, and attempt to capture it in a video recording if at all possible!