



Levels 3, 6,
and 9

Writing Aids includes helpful companion sections to this one: “Story Writing” and the Story Map and Characterization Grid supplements.

Playwriting

Introduction

One fun project suggested in *Tapestry of Grace* writing assignments for Levels 3, 6, and 9 is to write a play. This is the ultimate “show, don’t tell” genre. The writer has only the words and actions he gives to his characters to forward his plot and reveal his characters. He can employ no third-person narration or description. A play is primarily meant to be seen and heard, not read, so as you are planning out your student’s work, think of a way that his play can be performed, even in a very limited way.

Tapestry writing assignments adapt this genre in a variety of ways:

- * All of our playwriting assignments are based on (or connected with) historical studies.
- * In Year 1, plays are written during Unit 3, when students are reading about the invention of drama in ancient Greece.
- * Years 2 and 3 suggest a history-based play or skit to be performed at the Unit Celebration.
- * Year 4 students have this assignment very early in their school year (in Unit 1), the unique adaptation being a Roaring Twenties radio play. Ideally, these student scripts are to be pre-recorded and played for all at the Unit Celebration.

We recommend that the younger students and Level 9 students who may be short on time write only one scene of a play. Let them detail and craft that scene very closely and then outline the rest of the plot.

In any production of a play, you will need to give thought to various aspects of production.

- * If students perform live, they will need actors, direction, costumes, props, and rehearsal time.
- * If they pre-record a radio play, they will need rehearsal time, various voice-only actors, and recording time and equipment.¹
- * One great aid to live homeschool productions is the thrift store. Costumes galore await you at bargain prices in these fine establishments!
- * Another important way to avoid being overwhelmed with drama props and costs is to frequently employ mime when staging plays. Any prop can be indicated by an actor—from a drinking glass to a whole kitchen to an entire restaurant—using posture, gestures, and attitudes.

Prewriting

Level 3

The young student will enjoy this assignment, but we must warn you: it may take more of your time than many other writing assignments, so we suggest you take stock and set aside dedicated time to work with your youngster. We are not expecting lasting works of greatness at this level. Your goals for this assignment are two-fold: help your student achieve what he can in using “show, don’t tell” skills, and build the joy of learning with a lasting memory of the great years of homeschooling! The costs may be higher, but the benefits are proportionately greater in our experience.

- * Start by talking with the student about the ways that people reveal what they are thinking by

¹ An additional challenge with radio plays is sound effects. This can be overcome in many cases with pre-recorded ones available on discs at your public library, but before you pull this rabbit out of your hat, allow students to work at making as many sound effects from things around your house as you can. It’s an interesting exercise for them in noticing details. For instance, the sound of someone walking up to a door can be accomplished by taking shoes and “walking” them across a table top. The sound of fire is simulated by crackling cellophane near a microphone. Students may be able to make a great many sound effects with their mouths, too!



the things they say or do. Illustrate this by acting out various internal thoughts:

- A person who is in a hurry
- A person who is tired
- A person who is worried
- Ask him, “What did I say or do that gave you the idea of what I was thinking or feeling?”
- * Next, talk with your student about the scope of his assignment. We suggest that this little one write only one good scene or skit to be acted out (or recorded in Year 4), but we know there are many energetic and talented youngsters in your homes! You are the teacher: set the time/energy boundaries right from the beginning of this project.
- * After you’ve defined the scope of the project, introduce the student to the format of a script.
 - You can do this by showing him any play you may have in print: for instance, a volume of Shakespeare. (Note, though, that Shakespeare and ancient Greek plays are written in poetry formats; your child will write in prose.)
 - Note with your student the customary format. Usually, the character’s name is written at the left, and all his lines follow. Then, there’s a space before the next actor’s line(s).
 - It is for you to determine the final output that you expect from your student. Probably, you will be typing his work up after he drafts (or narrates) it.
- * Now it’s time to work out the general plot of the scene.
 - You can use our standard grammar-level Story Map supplement, found on the WA Disc.
 - Help him think out a plot that has a good beginning, interesting middle, and feeling of ending and (if you are so inclined) one that has a historical setting.
 - Remember, the whole plot is told to the audience by what actors say and do, so the story needs to be one that can be acted out by at least two actors.
 - Young students will usually be unbounded in thinking up wandering, multi-faceted plots that often have way too many characters. As with short story writing, help your student pare down the plot to a central idea and just a few characters whom the audience will get to know well.
- * These students are young for the Characterization Grid supplement, but it might benefit *you* to look it over and use elements of it to prompt your student, especially if your student is attempting a historically-based playlet.
 - Help him think about the way people talked, acted, and believed in the historical setting.
 - Show him illustrations from his History resources that portray people in the setting he has chosen.

Level 6

- * Start by talking with your student about the ways that people reveal what they are thinking or feeling by the things they say or do. Work with him to act out various internal thoughts. Take him to a mirror, and ask him how he would portray:
 - A person who is in a hurry.
 - A person who is tired.
 - A person who is worried.
- * Note with him the things that he did. Now, ask him to represent the same aspects using only words. Ask, “What *words* could convey the emotions above without actually *telling* me that you are hurried, tired, or worried?”
- * Next, talk with your student about the scope of his assignment.
 - Students at this age usually have sufficient time to write and produce a short skit to be



- acted out. You are the teacher, though. Set the time/energy boundaries at the outset!
- It is for you to determine the final output that you expect from your student: length of pages, type of format, size of font, etc. Be sure to let him know what you decide.
 - * After you've defined the scope of the project, introduce the student to the format of a typical script.
 - You can do this by showing him any play you may have in print at home: for instance, a volume of Shakespeare. (Note, though, that Shakespeare and ancient Greek plays are written in poetry formats; your child will write in prose.)
 - Note with him that, usually, the character's name is written at the left, and all his lines follow. Then there is a space that sets off those lines from the next character's lines.
 - Remind students that they will only put minimal direction in the script for actors' movements or gestures. Show them how playwrights will occasionally put in a word or phrase of direction (in parentheses), but mostly, the writer writes dialogue which actors and directors interpret and bring to life.
 - * Now it's time for the student to work out the general plot of the scene (or play).
 - Your student can use our Story Map supplement (the one for dialectic students).
 - Help him talk out a plot outline that has a good beginning, interesting middle, and feeling of ending, and if you are so inclined, one that has a historical setting.
 - Remember, 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. Left to themselves, students may be unbounded in thinking up wandering, multi-faceted plots that often have way too many characters. As with short story writing, help your student pare down the plot to a central idea and just a few characters whom the audience will get to know well.
 - * Students should also use the Characterization Grid supplement.
 - Help him think about the way people talked, acted, and believed in the historical setting.
 - Help your student think concretely about characters by showing him illustrations from his History resources that portray people in the setting he has chosen.
 - Then let him fill out one of these for each character he plans to have on stage.

Level 9

If you have been using *Tapestry* for a number of years, your student may have experience with this phase of playwriting. If so, let him follow the steps independently. Our tips below would most serve the teacher of students who are new to this genre at this age.

- * Start by talking with your student about the ways that people reveal what they are thinking by the things they say or do. Ask him to go to a mirror and portray:
 - A person who is in a hurry.
 - A person who is tired.
 - A person who is worried.
- * Note with him the things that he did. Now, ask him to represent the same aspects using only words. Ask, "What *words* could convey the emotions above without actually *telling* me that you are hurried, tired, or worried?" Coach and correct until he has the idea of "show, don't tell."
- * Next, talk with your student about the scope of his assignment.
 - Students at this age may not have sufficient time to write and produce a full-length skit to be acted out.
 - On the other hand, your student may have a co-op group that he is collaborating with so that his part in the process is manageable. You are the teacher, so set the time/energy boundaries at the outset!



- It is for you to determine the final output that you expect from your student: length of pages, type of format, size of font, etc. Be sure to let him know those expectations at the start of the project.
- Also go over *Tapestry* writing assignment charts with him so he knows the weekly goals for this multi-week process.
- * After you've defined the scope of the project, introduce the student to (or review with him) the format of a typical script.
 - He can learn this by looking at any play you may have in print: for instance, a volume of Shakespeare. (Note, though, that Shakespeare and ancient Greek plays are written in poetry formats; your child will write in prose.)
 - Note with him that, usually, the character's name is written at the left, and all his lines follow. Then there is a space that sets off those lines from the next character's lines.
 - Remind your student that he will only put minimal direction in the script for actors' movements or gestures. Show him how playwrights will occasionally put in a word or phrase of direction (in parentheses), but mostly, the writer writes dialogue which actors and directors interpret and bring to life.
- * Now it's time for the student to work out the general plot of the scene.
 - Your student can use our standard Story Map supplement (for dialectic and rhetoric students), found on the WA Disc.
 - Ask him to think out a plot that has a good beginning, interesting middle, and feeling of ending, and if you are so inclined, one that has a historical setting.
 - Remind him 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, encourage him to pare down the plot to a central idea and just a few characters whom the audience will get to know well.
- * Students at this age should also use the Characterization Grid supplement.
 - Your student should think about the way people talked, acted, and believed in the historical setting. (It may be helpful for him to use either the Internet or younger siblings' printed resources to remind himself of costumes and settings pertinent to his play).
 - Ask him to fill out one of these for each character he plans to have on stage before he starts drafting his play.

Drafting

Level 3

Students at this age should probably narrate their first draft to you while you type. We suggest that you set the computer for double-spaced paragraphs and for a large, easily read font size—we suggest size 12 Times New Roman—and good 2" margins for this rough draft.

- * Let your student tell you what the characters do and say, and translate this into the correct script format.
- * This phase may be accomplished in one session or may take several different ones.
- * We suggest that whenever he finishes narrating this first draft, you end the writing session for the day and give him time to rest before he does paper editing.

After the student has rested, print the draft, then let him read it and mark edits. An ideal way for him to do this is to read it aloud. Encourage him to do this independently, then help him see other ways to improve it as you help him enter changes into the computer.

Levels 6 and 9

These students should be capable of getting their first ideas down on paper independently. For some, writing the plot of the scene or play as prose and then shifting it to spoken lines may be



easier, but again, remind your student that he can't put description or direction into the script: it's all "show, don't tell!"

If your student gets stuck, encourage him to "talk it out." He can be first one actor and then another, and pace his room, gesticulating as he works to get the lines down on paper.

Editing

Probably the best way for students at all levels to edit their plays is to hear them read by actors. For this, siblings can be employed—and surely Dad would like to get into the act (literally)! The actors don't need to move at all at this stage; rather, employ a technique called "bench reading," where everyone has a part (or two) and reads them aloud, putting intonation into the voice but not making any other movements. The playwright should listen to this bench reading with a script in hand and make notes on how it could be improved.

Polishing and Presenting

This step would seem obvious: if the student is going to produce his play, it *will* be polished in the working out of the myriad of details that will arise as actors attempt to deliver the lines. Be prepared to help your student with the details of production and with sticky wickets he may encounter when blocking the show (telling actors where to stand).

The work should be presented, so help your young playwright find a suitable audience. You can produce the play for a Unit Celebration, before neighborhood friends, or at a family reunion, for instance. Above all: have fun! This assignment really is homeschooling at its best.