



PLAYWRITING UNIT: BEGINNER

By LINDSAY PRICE

This unit provides an introduction to the process of playwriting in a practical step-by-step framework. Playwriting can be a practical task-driven process that any student can accomplish, given the right parameters. This playwriting unit will give students the tools they need to write their first short play and gain the confidence they need to write further. The culminating project for this unit is a three- to five-page play or extended scene.

1 - What is a Playwright

In this first lesson, students discuss their preconceived notions about playwriting, their expectations and fears, and identify actions: What does a playwright do?

2 - Where Do Ideas Come From?

In this lesson, students will explore different methods of gathering ideas.

3 - Monologues

In this lesson, students will analyze existing monologues, identify the criteria for a good monologue, and write their own monologue in the practice session.

4 - Dialogue

In this lesson students will write two-character, one-location, ten-line scenes to practice getting to the heart of effective and efficient scene writing.

5 - Character

In this lesson, students will work on a character profile and apply character development details to a monologue or scene. Students will also receive the criteria for their culminating project and start work on their outlines.

6 - Conflict

In this lesson, students will work on a conflict profile and apply the details to a monologue. Student will also begin writing their first draft.

7 - What is Theatricality?

Students will answer the question "What is theatricality?" in terms of what makes a play stageable. Students will apply this concept to a stageability exercise.

8 - How Do You Give Feedback?

The first draft is due in this class. The class will begin with a feedback exercise. Then students will read their draft aloud and receive feedback.

9 - Writing and Post-First Draft Questions

Students are given time to work on their second draft. Students also receive a Post-First Draft Questions sheet to apply critical thinking skills to their draft.

10 - Writing and In-Depth Character Profile

Students are given time to work on their second draft. They will read an excerpt of their play aloud and receive feedback. Students will also receive an In-depth Character Profile sheet to help them apply critical thinking skills to their draft.

11 - Practice, Performance, Reflection

In these last two lessons, students will focus on the performance aspect of playwriting. It's important to include performance in the unit because the ultimate goal of all plays is to be performed (rather than read). Students have the opportunity to rehearse in groups, present to the class, and then reflect on their experience with the unit.

Standards Connections

National Core Arts Standards

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work - Grade 6

TH:Cr1.1.6.c - Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art - Grade 7

TH:Cn10.1.7.a - Incorporate multiple perspectives and diverse community ideas in a drama/theatre work.

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work - Grade 7

TH:Cr1.1.7.c - Envision and describe a scripted or improvised character's inner thoughts and objectives in a drama/theatre work.

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work - Grade 8

TH:Cr1.1.8.c - Develop a scripted or improvised character by articulating the character's inner thoughts, objectives, and motivations in a drama/theatre work.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art - Grade 8

TH:Cn10.1.8.a - Examine a community issue through multiple perspectives in a drama/theatre work.

Perceive and analyze artistic work - Grade 8

TH:Re7.1.8.a - Apply criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art - Grade HS Proficient

TH:Cn10.1.HS1.a - Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art - Grade HS Accomplished

TH:Cn10.1.HSII.a - Choose and interpret a drama/theatre work to reflect or question personal beliefs.

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work - Grade 6

TH:Cr2.1.6.a - Use critical analysis to improve, refine, and evolve original ideas and artistic choices in a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work - Grade 6

TH:Re8.1.6.a - Explain how artists make choices based on personal experience in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re8.1.6.b - Identify cultural perspectives that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re8.1.6.c - Identify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in or observation of drama/theatre work.

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work - Grade 7

TH:Cr2.1.7.a - Examine and justify original ideas and artistic choices in a drama/theatre work based on critical analysis, background knowledge, and historical and cultural context.

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work - Grade HS Proficient

TH:Cr2.1.HS1.b - Investigate the collaborative nature of the actor, director, playwright, and designers and explore their interdependent roles in a drama/theatre work.

Refine new work through play, drama processes and theatre experiences using critical analysis and experimentation - Grade 6

TH:Cr3.1.6.a - Articulate and examine choices to refine a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

Refine new work through play, drama processes and theatre experiences using critical analysis and experimentation - Grade 8

TH:Cr3.1.8.a - Use repetition and analysis in order to revise devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work - Grade HS Accomplished

TH:Re9.1.HSII.a - Analyze and assess a drama/theatre work by connecting it to art forms, history, culture, and other disciplines using supporting evidence and criteria.

Common Core

Reading: Literature

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3 - Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Language

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5 - Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

California VAPA Standards (2019)

6.TH:Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

6.TH:Cr1.b - Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

7.TH:Cn10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

7.TH:Cn10 - Incorporate multiple perspectives and diverse community ideas in a drama/theatre work.

7.TH:Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

7.TH:Cr1.b - Envision and describe a scripted or improvised character's inner thoughts and objectives in a drama/theatre work.

8.TH:Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

8.TH:Cr1.b - Develop a scripted or improvised character by articulating the character's inner thoughts, objectives, and motivations in a drama/theatre work.

8.TH:Cn10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

8.TH:Cn10 - Examine a community issue through multiple perspectives in a drama/theatre work.

8.TH:Re7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

8.TH:Re7 - Apply appropriate criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

Prof.TH:Cn10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Prof.TH:Cn10 - Investigate how cultural contexts, community ideas, and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work.

Acc.TH:Cn10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Acc.TH:Cn10 - Choose and interpret a drama/theatre work to reflect or question personal beliefs.

6.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

6.TH.Re8.a - Explain how artists make choices based on personal experience in a drama/theatre work.

6.TH.Re8.b - Identify cultural contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

6.TH.Re8.c - Identify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in or observation of drama/theatre work.

6.TH:Cr2 Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

6.TH:Cr2.a - Use critical analysis to improve, refine, and evolve original ideas and artistic choices in a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

7.TH:Cr2 Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

7.TH:Cr2.a - Examine and justify original ideas and artistic choices in a drama/theatre work based on critical analysis, personal experience, and historical and cultural context.

Prof.TH:Cr2 Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Prof.TH:Cr2.b - Investigate the collaborative nature of the actor, director, playwright, and designers and their interdependent roles in a drama/theatre work.

6.TH:Cr3 Refine and complete artistic work.

6.TH:Cr3.a - Receive and incorporate feedback to refine a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

8.TH:Cr3 Refine and complete artistic work.

8.TH:Cr3.a - Practice collaboration, analysis and reflection to refine a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

Acc.TH:Re9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Acc.TH.Re9.a - Analyze and assess a drama/theatre work by connecting it to art forms, history, culture, and other disciplines using supporting evidence and criteria

Florida Sunshine State Standards

Critical Thinking & Reflection

TH.912.C.1.5 - Make and defend conscious choices in the creation of a character that will fulfill anticipated audience response.

TH.912.C.1.7 - Justify personal perceptions of a director's vision and/or playwright's intent.

TH.912.C.2.2 - Construct imaginative, complex scripts and revise them in collaboration with actors to convey story and meaning to an audience.

Innovation, Technology & the Future

TH.912.F.1.1 - Synthesize research, analysis, and imagination to create believable characters and settings.

Georgia Performance Standards - Theatre Arts

Grade 6 - Creating

TA6.CR.1 - Organize, design, and refine theatrical work., a. Identify artistic choices, utilize theatre vocabulary, and demonstrate non-verbal communication skills in the rehearsal process., b. Interpret a character's motivation by understanding the relationship between their background and their behavior., c. Identify the variety of relationships between characters., d. Identify, define, and classify character traits.,

e. Recognize and demonstrate the roles, responsibilities, and skills associated with collaborative performance., f. Use resources to identify and create technical elements of theatre.

TA6.CR.2 - Develop scripts through theatrical techniques., a. Identify the elements of a story., b. Identify the theme and structure of a play., c. Articulate creative ideas in oral and written forms., d. Use the dramatic writing process to generate a script., e. Demonstrate the conventions of dialogue and stage directions.

Grade 7 - Creating

TA7.CR.1 - Organize, design, and refine theatrical work., a. Identify and rehearse effective communication skills., b. Compare and contrast character types and relationships by analyzing character motivations, objectives, and goals., c. Compare the physical, emotional, vocal, and social dimensions of a character., d. Investigate the role and responsibility of the cast and crew., e. Identify and model ensemble skills in the rehearsal process., f. Utilize staging and blocking choices to enhance the performance., g. Compare, contrast, and design elements of technical theatre., h. Utilize theatre vocabulary throughout the rehearsal process.

TA7.CR.2 - Develop scripts through theatrical techniques., a. Create ideas for stories., b. Analyze the theme and structure of a play., c. Use the dramatic writing process to generate a script., d. Utilize dramatic conventions in the scriptwriting process (e.g. stage directions, dialogue, scenes).

Grade 7 - Connecting

TA7.CN.1 - Explore how theatre connects to life experience, careers, and other content., a. Compare and contrast theatre with other art forms., b. Articulate relationships between theatre and life., c. Utilize a multi-disciplinary approach to create original theatre., d. Describe the careers and professional responsibilities associated with theatre production (e.g. director, stage manager, designer, technician, playwright, actor).

Grade 8 - Creating

TA8.CR.1 - Organize, design, and refine theatrical work., a. Differentiate the physical, emotional, vocal, and social dimensions of a variety of characters., b. Compare the relationships and interactions between characters by analyzing character motivation (objectives, obstacles, strategy, action, stakes, outcome), c. Incorporate dramatic elements through improvisation., d. Connect theatre vocabulary to the application of theatre performance., e. Identify and demonstrate both ensemble and leadership skills in the rehearsal process., f. Evaluate the effectiveness of artistic and technical elements used in a theatre production., g. Design and create scenery, props, costumes, lighting, and sound., h. Assume different roles and responsibilities in the rehearsal process.

TA8.CR.2 - Develop scripts through theatrical techniques., a. Classify different points of view in a story., b. Identify, analyze, and articulate the structure of a script., c. Utilize improvisation techniques to generate script ideas., d. Use the dramatic writing process to generate a script.

Grades 9-12 - ACTING LEVELS I-IV - Creating

TAHSA.CR.1 - Organize, design, and refine theatrical work., a. Use script analysis in the development and presentation of formal and informal theatre performances., b. Examine various theories of dramatic structure., c. Engage in and apply meaningful cultural, literary, and historical research to create acting choices or directorial concepts.

TAHSA.CR.2 - Develop scripts through theatrical techniques., a. Examine theatre practices regarding the development, structure, layout, and format of scripts., b. Use improvisation, personal experiences, heritage, imagination,

literature, and history to develop scripts., c. Perform formal and informal monologues and scenes based on published and original scripts.

Grades 9-12 - ADVANCED DRAMA LEVELS I-IV -Creating

TAHSAD.CR.2 - Develop scripts through theatrical techniques., a. Utilize theatrical conventions to produce scripts based on personal experiences, imagination, literature, and history.

North Carolina Essential Standards

Proficient High School Standards - Communication

P.C.1.3 - Create original works, such as monologues, scenes, or performance pieces.

Proficient High School Standards - Analysis

P.A.1.1 - Analyze full-length plays in terms of plot structure, pacing, given circumstances, and character development.

P.A.1.2 - Distinguish the evolution of written texts to theatrical performances.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Theatre Arts

HS 117.315 LI - Creative Expression: performance

C.2.F - create, write, and refine original monologues, improvisations, scenes, or vignettes that reflect dramatic structure to convey meaning to the audience through live performance or media forms.

HS 117.316 LII - Creative Expression: performance

C.2.F - create, write, devise, and refine original monologues, improvisations, scenes, or vignettes to convey meaning to the audience through live performance or media forms.

HS 117.317 LIII - Creative Expression: performance

C.2.C - analyze characters from various genres and styles, describing physical, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions.

C.2.E - write dialogue that reveals character motivation, advances plot, provides exposition, and reveals theme.

Alberta, Canada

Speech Drama 20

15 - demonstrate expressive reading of literature

17 - identify script indicators of a character's vocal quality

Playwriting - Drama 20

1 - demonstrate understanding of the basic structure of a play

10 - define conflict

11 - construct a conflict between two characters (protagonist and antagonist)

12 - construct a scene with two contrasting characters

13 - give and accept constructive criticism

3 - demonstrate understanding of script format

4 - generate and collect ideas that have dramatic possibilities

5 - write a scenario

7 - demonstrate understanding if and write exposition

8 - use effective diction

9 - define character objectives

Junior Goal II Objectives

become familiar with dramatic terminology and script

format

Junior Goal III Objectives

develop the ability to analyze and assess the process and the art

Junior Orientation

demonstrate a willingness to take calculated and reasonable risks

show awareness of story sequence

Junior Goal I Objectives

develop the ability to offer and accept constructive criticism

develop the willingness to make a decision, act upon it and accept the results

extend the ability to explore, control and express emotions

extend the ability to think imaginatively and creatively

Theatre Studies Level III - Advanced (The script)

10 - demonstrate understanding of the concept of dramatic convention

11 - demonstrate understanding of plot structure

12 - analyze a script to identify character, setting and plot

7 - define the elements of script, dialogue, directions, characters and settings

9 - read a script aloud

Senior Goal I Objectives

demonstrate respect for others-their rights, ideas, abilities and differences

demonstrate the ability to considered decisions, act upon them and accept the results

demonstrate the ability to contribute effectively and constructively to the group process

demonstrate the ability to initiate, organize and present a project within a given set of guidelines

develop a sense of inquiry and commitment to learning

extend understanding of, acceptance of and empathy for others

Senior Goal II Objectives

be capable of creating and expressing a believable character from scripted and non-scripted material

explore various approaches to analyzing a script for purposes of study and/or presentation

gain knowledge of disciplines that enhance dramatic process and product

Orientation Drama 10

concentrate on the task at hand

demonstrate effective use and management of time

demonstrate willingness to challenge and extend oneself: physically, emotionally, intellectually and artistically

positively support the work of others

share ideas confidently

British Columbia (2018)

GRADE 9 - DRAMA - Exploring and creating

Create dramatic works both collaboratively and as an individual, using ideas inspired by imagination, inquiry, and purposeful play

Select and combine dramatic elements and principles to intentionally create a particular mood, effect, and meaning

Take creative risks to experience and express thoughts, emotions, and meaning

GRADE 9 - DRAMA - Reasoning and reflecting

Describe, interpret, and evaluate how performers and

playwrights use dramatic structures, elements, and techniques to create and communicate ideas

Develop and refine ideas and technical skills to improve the quality of performance pieces

Receive, offer, and apply constructive feedback

GRADE 9 - DRAMA - Communicating and documenting

Compose, interpret, and expand ideas using symbolism, imagery, and elements

Revise, refine, analyze, and document performance pieces and experiences to enhance presentation in a variety of ways

GRADE 9 - DRAMA - Connecting and expanding

Collaborate through reciprocal relationships during creative processes

Create personally meaningful bodies of artistic works that demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of social, cultural, environmental, and historical contexts

Reflect on creative processes to make connections to personal learning and experiences

GRADE 10 - DRAMA - Explore and Create

Create dramatic works with an intended audience in mind

Develop a repertoire of dramatic skills and techniques through presentation or performance

Experiment with a range of props, processes, and technologies

Explore and create dramatic works to express ideas and emotions

Explore dramatic works through presentation or performance

Intentionally select and combine drama conventions

GRADE 10 - DRAMA - Reason and reflect

Apply feedback to develop and refine ideas

Describe, analyze, and respond using drama-specific language

Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences

GRADE 10 - DRAMA - Communicate and document

Compose, interpret, and expand ideas using symbolism and imagery

Express personal voice to respond to environmental and social issues

GRADE 10 - DRAMA - Connect and expand

Demonstrate respect for self, others, and the audience

Ontario, Canada

Grades 9 & 10 - Foundations - Context and Influences

C.2.1 - identify ways in which dramatic expression and performance reflect communities and cultures, past and present (e.g., the prominence of socially and/or politically powerful characters in the drama of pre-industrial societies; the use of boy actors for female roles in Shakespearean theatre; the emphasis on religious themes in the drama of many cultures in different eras)

Grades 9 & 10 - Foundations - Concepts and Terminology

C.1.1 - identify the drama forms, elements, conventions, and techniques used in their own and others' drama works, and explain how the various components are used, or can be used, to achieve specific effects, with a focus on ensemble drama works (e.g., how a comic drama form can be used to convey a serious message, how setting and time period can be used to sharpen the focus on a moral dilemma, how characters can be used to vary the mood within a drama)

C.1.2 - demonstrate an understanding of and use correct terminology to refer to the forms, elements, conventions, and techniques of drama, with a focus on ensemble drama works (e.g., chorus, protagonist, ingénue, supporting role, act, scene, climax, resolution, improvisation, mask, freeze-frame image)

Grades 9 & 10 - Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing - Drama and Society

B.2.1 - identify different types of drama and explain their function in diverse communities and cultures from the past and present (e.g., the function of television, film, or video game dramas with predictable plot lines and stock or stereotypical characters in today's society; the function of theatre in ancient Greece, liturgical drama in medieval Europe, Shakespearean drama in Elizabethan England, and/or "social problem" dramas today)

B.2.2 - explain how dramatic exploration helps develop awareness of different roles and identities people have in society (e.g., explain what they learned through role playing characters from different socio-economic groups)

B.2.4 - identify ways in which dramatic exploration contributes to their understanding of diverse cultures and traditions (e.g., identify insights they gained through exploring the role of ritual in Greek theatre and/or Aboriginal ceremonies)

Grades 9 & 10 - Creating and Presenting - Elements and Conventions

A.2.1 - select and combine the elements of drama to achieve a variety of purposes in ensemble presentations (e.g., use the elements of character, time, and place in a drama about making a difficult choice; use the elements of time and place to clarify the focus in a drama about a historical event)

A.2.2 - use a variety of conventions to create a distinct voice that reflects a particular global, social, or personal perspective (e.g., use voices in the head, role on the wall, and hot seating to create a complex character from another region or country)

Grades 9 & 10 - Creating and Presenting - The Creative Process

A.1.1 - develop interpretations of issues from contemporary or historical sources (e.g., photographs, videos, music, newspaper/magazine articles, an eyewitness account of a historical event) as the basis for drama

A.1.2 - select and use appropriate forms to present identified issues from a variety of perspectives (e.g., use a radio play, improvisation, or series of tableaux to present two opposing views about a political, social, or environmental issue)

A.1.3 - use role play and characterization to explore personal and social issues (e.g., with a partner, create or assume a role that explores an issue such as bullying; create a scenario that reveals details about a character's motivation)