Write
YOUR OWN
VIGNETTE PLAY

Drama Teacher
ACADEMY

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Introduction

You want to work with your students to write and perform an original play.

BUT...

- You don’t know where to start.
- You’ve never written a play before.
- You don’t know how to corral a mass of ideas into a single focused piece.
- Your students have never written a play before.
- You have students who don’t feel creative.

Write Your Own addresses all these issues and offers a step by step process from choosing a theme, to generating source material, to using improvisation, to a final draft.

Use Write Your Own with a class, drama club, or summer group to write a play.

This volume of Write Your Own covers the Vignette Play. The Vignette Play is an easily adaptable format which applies multiple strategies (brainstorming, planning, experimenting, communicating, revising, presenting) and is an excellent method for group-created original theatre.

It works especially well for groups with varying levels of confidence when it comes to writing. By the end, all students will feel able to contribute to the writing process regardless of natural writing ability.
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Chapter One: What is a Vignette Play?

What is a Vignette Play and why is it suitable for original play creation?

A vignette is a short scene. A Vignette Play is a script made up of vignettes, centering on a theme.

So instead of the play having one story with a beginning, middle and end, each scene is a complete story. Each scene shows a different take or interpretation of the theme. Each scene can explore a different style, from traditional, to monologue, to tableau, to abstract, to musical.

VIGNETTE PLAY EXAMPLES

I have written a number of Vignette Plays:

**WAIT WAIT BO BAIT**

Theme: Waiting

Scene Examples:

- Two boys wait outside the principal’s office awaiting their punishment.
- A girl waits by the phone for a boy to call her.
- Kids waiting to open their Christmas presents.
- A girl wants to know how long she should wait for the man of her dreams.
- A student worries as she waits to make a class presentation.

**THIS PHONE WILL EXPLODE AT THE TONE**

Theme: Communication – how we do and how we don’t.

Scene Examples:

- Two girls talk about their troubles in the middle of the night.
- A boy works up the courage to ask a girl out.
- Dealing with an obscene phone caller.
- Two guys have the worst conversation ever.
- The phone police.
HAIRBALL

Theme: Hair

Scene Examples:

• A boy wants to know how long he has before going bald.
• A girl gets angry at her boyfriend when he insults her hair.
• A girl with cancer tries on wigs.
• The bad haircut.
• The psychology of the hair puller.
• Going blonde, Shakespeare style.

The possibilities are endless when it comes to the Vignette Play. Any avenue is possible: teen issues, school issues, the environment, current events, historical events, headlines, war, the economy, the list goes on.

WHY USE THE VIGNETTE PLAY?

Flexible Casting: Because the play focuses on short scenes, there isn’t a set character list. If you have actors who are showing less commitment, if you have actors who drop out, if you have actors who want join in, you can change the casting.

Broad Appeal: This format is excellent for a variety of groups. It works well as a project for a class that has little theatrical experience. It works well for a drama club that wants to write their own play for competition. It works well in a summer camp scenario where participants may not know each other well.

Flexible Rehearsals: With multiple scenes, you can have more actors working at the same time, rather than actors sitting around until their turn onstage.

More Control: There’s more control in multiple authors writing multiple short scenes, rather than trying to co-ordinate a group to agree on and write one single story.

The Ability to Give Students Control: The class play project is an excellent student-driven assignment. In some situations it has been used as a final exam. The project allows you to observe the work ethic of your students, their team-building skills, how they handle the decision-making process when they are in control. These are all assessable skills that rely less on the difficult-to-quantify notion of “creativity.”
Multiple Authors: It is easier to encourage different writing voices in the absence of a single story. Scenes can have different viewpoints, different tones, and explore different genres. Actors who take part in the creation feel more ownership of the play.

Economical Staging: Vignette Plays work best with sparse staging and costuming. With multiple short scenes, it’s better to have a unit set (cubes and risers) that can be used over and over again instead of a specific set for each scene. A specific set requires the play to stop every two to three minutes for a scene change, breaking the flow of the play. The same applies for costuming. Use a neutral costume that works for all the scenes with perhaps some hand props or small costume pieces that can be easily and swiftly added on.

HOW LONG SHOULD A VIGNETTE PLAY BE?
Because you’re working with scenes on a theme, rather than the development of a single story, 30 minutes is an ideal length for the Vignette Play – it’s short enough to keep an audience and long enough to give the group a substantial creation project. An audience will hang in and be interested in scene work, but after awhile there needs to be a developing story to hold them.

HOW MANY ACTORS ARE IN A VIGNETTE PLAY?
This is completely up to you! Flexible casting is at the heart of the Vignette Play. You can have each actor perform in only one scene (and so have a very large cast) or you can have actors perform in multiple scenes (for a smaller cast).

WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO WRITING A VIGNETTE PLAY?
This guide will offer a step-by-step process designed to help get your group efficiently and effectively to a final product:

- Establish and practice how to brainstorm in groups.
- Establish and practice how to brainstorm individually.
- Decide on a theme.
- Improv on the theme in a theatrical context.
- Start the formal scene-writing process.
- Decide on the shape of the play.
• Assemble the first draft.
• Record and organize.
• Move beyond the first draft.
• Choose a title.
• The final product.

The first thing to notice is that writing scenes does not occur immediately in this process. It’s vital that students don’t start writing scenes as their first step. While this may seem counter-productive (you are working on a play after all) it’s very purposeful.

Following each step is especially important if you have students who feel insecure in their ability to write. Every class has one or two students who already have the natural instinct to write a play. But this is a group project and that means there are 20-30 students who don’t have that instinct. These steps are going to encourage insecure students, providing them with a process that they’ll be able to use in any writing situation.
Chapter Two: Brainstorming

*Brainstorming: A technique of solving problems, amassing information, stimulating thinking, developing new ideas through unrestrained and spontaneous discussion. – dictionary.com*

Brainstorming can be extremely effective for generating source material. It can also turn into a chaotic mess with participants yelling out their ideas while shooting down others, causing some to censor themselves and feel insecure about what they have to contribute.

Students have to work together, respect the ideas of others, and learn how to get their work on the page without self-judgment or self-censorship.

Therefore, the first step in this process is to practice brainstorming in groups. This is not about finding the theme for the play, it’s about gaining confidence with a particular technique. Once students are comfortable with this aspect, then they’re ready to move forward.

**BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE**

*Purpose:* To practice brainstorming.

- Break your class up into groups.
- Give each group chart paper, a marker, and an index card. A category (e.g. Current Events, Historical Events, Education, Teen Issues, Technology, Religion, Inventions, Medicine, Science, Culture, Sports) is written on the index card.
- Each group has a five minute time limit to write down (on the chart paper) anything and everything that comes to mind when they think of that category. This can include questions, thoughts, stories, emotions, words, images, sensory ideas, books, movies, etc. and explore the category.

**Coaching Tips**

Don’t push students to ‘find’ themes, or come up with ‘good’ ideas. Most importantly, do not push students to think in terms of what they want to write about just yet. This is just an exercise.

*Continue writing your Vignette Play! Order Write Your Own Vignette Play now at [theatrefolk.com/write-vignette](http://theatrefolk.com/write-vignette)*