



Sample Pages from
Scene Self-Staging: Teaching Students to
Block Theatrically and Independently

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SCENE SELF-STAGING

Teaching Students to
Block Theatrically
& Independently



Theatrefolk®

Lindsay Price

Scene Self-Staging: Teaching Students to Block Theatrically and Independently
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Scene Self-Staging: Teaching Students to Block Theatrically and Independently

Whether it's for competition, for a specific unit, or as part of a culminating assessment, there will be a time when you're going to want students to work independently on a scene. But when they present, it can seem as though they have forgotten everything you've taught them. They don't use levels. They wander. They don't do any character-driven blocking. You spent time introducing the necessary skills. Why don't they apply them in independent scene work? How many times have you sat through scene after scene that doesn't show students at their best? Sometimes you can't just say to students, "Prepare this scene; you present on Tuesday." They need a process to follow. So why not give them a procedure that hits the skills you want them to demonstrate, allows them to bring a scene to life on their own, and finally, creates an engaging, theatrical product?

Use this resource to help students achieve their goal: a fully staged scene with specific, dynamic blocking and three-dimensional characters.

This book provides an in-depth step-by-step process – from choosing a scene to script analysis to presentation. Each step comes with rehearsal objectives and outlines. There are journal prompts, worksheets, checklists, and Reflections. Use what works for you and your students. If your students respond better to Reflections than checklists, great. If you don't have enough time to have students complete every rehearsal with all the worksheets, then don't. Do what you can. Add elements to your existing process. Do one rehearsal as a class, analyze and discuss the results, and have students apply the elements of that one rehearsal to their scene work. The point is to give students tools to make their scenes better. It all helps.

Everything is geared toward independent, student-driven staging in which you can be as involved or as hands-off as you wish. Assessment suggestions are provided for each step, or you can just use the Performance Rubric.

Let's get students staging scenes to be the most theatrical, to the best of their ability – and to do it all without you!



NOTES

Time Management: Not every rehearsal will take a single class period. Every area is different when it comes to class length, and every scene will require different pacing when it comes to approaching script analysis, exercises, and rehearsals.

Video: A number of rehearsals suggest that students record each other and review their work. It doesn't need to be complicated or involve special equipment. Have students use their phones. The point is that they have a method to visually analyze what they're doing.

Sample Scene: A sample scene is provided in Appendix Two. Throughout the resource, this scene is used to demonstrate examples of various tasks and exercises. Feel free to switch it out for one of your own choosing.

Vocal Choices: Be aware that, because this is a staging resource guide, there isn't an equal focus on vocal choices or vocal techniques students need to perform their best. (e.g. projection, diction, articulation).



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CHOOSING THE SCENE

How do you choose the best scene for you and your partner(s)?

It's easy when you're choosing a scene to pick something that's done a lot. Or to pick a scene that you find in a book. Or to choose something from a play you recognize. These are valid reasons for picking a scene – you're looking for the familiar.

But there are other factors to consider when choosing a scene. You will be working on this scene intensely for an extended period of time. And if there isn't something you connect to in a scene, it can become a chore to work on. That's not going to help you make the scene the best that it can be.

TOP TIPS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A SCENE

- The scene has to be balanced.
When choosing a scene, the focus should be balanced between the characters. One character shouldn't have the majority of the workload or the shining moments. Ask yourself: Do all characters get a chance to shine?
- Characters must want something.
The best way to create action in a scene is through characters pursuing a specific want. What motivates your character? What drives them? When choosing a scene, there should be a clear character want for each. This is going to make the scene exciting and fun to play.
- There should be a problem to be solved in the moment.
Another thing to consider is the content of the scene. Ask yourself: What's the conflict? What's the thing that's in the way of the characters getting what they want? What problem is there to be solved? If there's a lot of exposition or storytelling in the scene, it isn't going to have as much impact and it will be difficult to find dynamic blocking.
- The scene should be easy to stage.
This doesn't mean that the blocking is simple. It means that you don't need a mountain of props, furniture, or set pieces to execute the scene. If the scene relies on a slamming door, or a full Thanksgiving dinner, it's not going to be a good choice. Ask yourself: If we mime everything, will that lessen the impact of the scene?



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- The scene should have action.

There are three types of action:

- **Character action:** Characters pursuing a want with a variety of tactics
- **Physical action:** The movement in the scene and character physicality
- **Verbal action:** Vocal pacing, vocal variety, and vocal interpretation

The most impactful scenes will have all three. Ask yourself: is this scene active or static?

- You also have to think about what makes the scene best for you.

These are the factors that are going to make the scene fun to work on for an extended period of time. Consider the following:

- What do you connect to most in the scene? In your character?
- What is challenging in the scene?
- Why is this the best scene for you and your scene partner(s)?

Choosing the Scene Worksheet

Answer the following questions about your scene.

What is the play?	
What is the scene?	
Where does the scene take place?	
What staging elements, if any, are necessary to execute the scene?	
Who are the characters?	
What do they want?	
What is the conflict?	
What do you connect to most in this scene?	
What do you connect to most in your character?	
Why is this scene challenging?	
Why is this the best scene for you and scene your partner(s)?	



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Choosing the Scene Worksheet Example

Using the sample scene found in Appendix Two

1. What is the play? *The Importance of Being Earnest*
2. What is the scene? *Act 2, Cecily and Gwendolen first meeting*
3. Where does the scene take place? *The scene takes place in the garden of Manor House, which is full of roses.*
4. What staging elements, if any are necessary to execute the scene? *Both ladies have diaries; there is a chair and a table.*
5. Who are the characters? *Cecily Cardew: Jack's ward who lives in the country. Gwendolen Fairfax: daughter of Lady Bracknell*
6. What do they want? *They both want to be married to Ernest Worthing.*
7. What's the conflict? *Both ladies want to be married to Ernest, and the thing in the way of doing that is each other. They each want the other character to be wrong about their engagement.*
8. What do you connect to most in this scene? *The humour, because of the subtext. That is going to be so much fun to play!*
9. What do you connect to most in your character? *The balance between her politeness and her putdowns.*
10. What is challenging? *The accents are going to be challenging. Also, the characters don't know they're being funny – we have to make it real.*
11. Why is this the best scene for you and your partner? *This scene is the best scene for us because we want a comedic scene, we want to explore creating a specific physicality and subtext. And both characters get equal time with both of these things.*

Choosing the Scene Journal Prompts

A selection of questions to encourage students to think about the process of choosing a scene.

1. What is the most important part of choosing a scene? Explain your answer.
2. Do you want to work on a comedy scene or a drama? Explain your answer.
3. Which types of scenes are harder: comedies or drama? Explain your answer.
4. Should you use scene books to find a scene? Why or why not?
5. What should you look for when choosing a scene? Explain your answer.
6. What are five dos and five don'ts when choosing a scene?
7. What makes a scene impactful? Explain your answer.
8. What makes a scene boring? Explain your answer.
9. Is it important to like the scene you choose for competition? Why or why not?
10. Should you choose a scene with a lot of blocking or no blocking? Why?
11. What past experience do you have with scene work? What worked? What didn't?
12. If you have past experience working on scenes, what are you going to change for this time?
13. If you don't have past experience, what are your expectations?
14. What are your strengths when it comes to working with other people?
15. What challenges do you anticipate working on a scene?
16. What goes into choosing perfect scene partners for a scene?
17. What do you want out of this scene study experience? What is your goal?
18. Which is more challenging – monologues or scenes? Explain your answer.
19. What risk will you take with this scene study? Why?
20. What life skills does scene study help you improve? Explain your answer.



Choosing the Scene Checklist

Scene Partners: _____

My scene partner(s) and I have...

- Chosen a scene to perform
- Chosen a balanced scene
- Chosen a scene where all characters want something
- Chosen a scene with a problem to be solved
- Chosen a scene that is easy to stage
- Chosen a scene with action
- Determined what we connect most to in our characters
- Determined what we connect most to in the scene
- Determined what makes this scene best for us
- Completed the Choosing the Scene Worksheet

NOTES:



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READING THE SCENE: THE BASICS

You've chosen a scene. Congratulations! Your next step is to read the scene. There are three aspects to reading the scene.

1. The basics – the easily identified facts of the scene
2. Script Analysis - a three-part script analysis section
3. Scoring - Scoring the scene into beats

THE BASICS

Compiling the basics is a great introduction to the scene. Instead of diving in deep right away, simply read the scene and identify some general knowledge that will help you play the scene.

Should you read the whole play? If you're using a scene where the characters only appear in your chosen scene (for example: from a vignette play), then it's not necessary. However, if your scene comes from a larger piece, it can only help if you read the full play. Reading the whole play allows you to identify necessary plot points and character details leading up your scene. Knowing the complete world of the play will only make your work better. You also want to make sure you're playing your character in a way that's consistent with the rest of the play.

THE BASICS – QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions to determine the basics for your scene. Don't worry if you've answered a question before or if you're not sure of an answer. Get everything and anything down. Discuss your answers with your scene partner(s). Make educated guesses. Have answers and never leave it as "I don't know."

1. What is happening in the scene?
 - Write down the individual plot points of the scene.
2. Describe the scene in one sentence in your own words.
 - After you have all the plot points written down, condense the plot into one sentence. What is this scene really about?
3. On this first read, what is the most important moment in the scene and why?
 - What is the scene building to?
4. What character facts are in the scene?
 - Identify any facts about your character in the dialogue. Facts are not opinions, desires, or wishes. They are unchangeable details (character age, family members, name).
5. What makes the scene theatrical?
 - This final question marks the transition between identifying the basics in your scene and a more detailed script analysis. Now that you've read the scene, think about what makes the scene a piece of theatre. What makes it theatrical?

Reading the Scene: The Basics Worksheet

Answer the following questions about your scene.

What is the play/ scene?	
What is happening in the scene? Write out the individual plot points.	
Describe the scene in one sentence in your own words. What is the scene really about?	
What is the most important moment in the scene and why?	
What character facts are in the scene? Facts are not opinions, desires, or wishes – they are unchangeable details (character age, family members, name).	
What makes the scene theatrical?	



Reading the Scene: The Basics

Worksheet Example

Using the sample scene found in Appendix Two

1. What is the play/scene? *The Importance of Being Earnest, Act 2, Cecily and Gwendolen first meeting*
2. What is happening in this scene?
 - a. *Cecily introduces herself to Gwendolen.*
 - b. *Gwendolen introduces herself and announces they are going to be great friends.*
 - c. *Gwendolen assumes that Cecily is at the manor temporarily.*
 - d. *Cecily reveals that she lives at the manor and is Jack's ward.*
 - e. *Gwendolen reveals she did not know "Ernest" had a ward.*
 - f. *Gwendolen reveals that she knows "Ernest."*
 - g. *Cecily states that Ernest Worthing is the brother not the guardian.*
 - h. *Cecily reveals that she is engaged to "Ernest" Worthing.*
 - i. *Gwendolen reveals that she is engaged "to Ernest" Worthing.*
 - j. *Both think that "Ernest" is the same person.*
 - k. *Both feel the other has entrapped "Ernest" into an engagement.*
3. Describe the scene in one sentence in your own words. *Cecily and Gwendolen meet and discover they are both engaged to Ernest Worthing.*
4. What is the most important moment in the scene?
 - a. *When the ladies reveal they are both engaged to the same person. It's important because the ladies want to stop being polite and can't. There is a struggle between decorum and wanting to express their true feelings.*
5. What character facts are in the scene?
 - a. *Gwendolen's last name is Fairfax, her father is Lord Bracknell, she has glasses, and is going to be married to Ernest Worthing.*
 - b. *Cecily's last name is Cardew, she lives at the estate, is Mr Worthing's ward, and is going to be married to Ernest Worthing.*
6. What makes this scene theatrical? *The characters in this scene have a lot going on! They both have a specific want: to marry Ernest and a drive to make that happen. There's their public persona and their private feelings, which the audience should be able to see. The audience knows the truth of the situation, but this is the first time the characters are learning about it. Thus the audience becomes a part of the scene. The character-driven action and the audience connection make it theatrical.*

READING THE SCENE: SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Script analysis isn't a cursory scan of the script. You want to do a close reading, multiple times, and mine the text for as much information as possible. You want to know who your character is, why they act the way they do and, most importantly, how can you physicalize all your newfound knowledge. At the end of each read, identify possible staging ideas – for your character and for the plot. Always connect any analysis you do with your eventual goal: a staged scene with specific, dynamic blocking and three-dimensional characters.

SCRIPT ANALYSIS

When analyzing a scene, read it three times. Each read will have a different focus:

Read One

- What is happening in the scene?
 - Plot, conflict, MDQ (major dramatic question), theme

Read One focuses on analyzing the story. You've identified what's happening in the scene. Now it's time to go in-depth. Identify your beginning, middle, and end plot points. Compare your scene with the classic dramatic structure formula (exposition, inciting incident, rising action, crisis, climax, falling action, denouement). What is the inciting incident at the beginning? What is the crisis? How does the scene end – does it conclude or is it unresolved? Not every scene will have every single structure element (indeed, not even every play has all of these elements). But if there isn't a defined beginning, middle, and end to your scene that's something to pay attention to. Have you picked a dynamic scene?

You also want to identify the conflict. What is the problem to be solved in this scene? Again, if the scene lacks an identifiable conflict, is it going to be dynamic to work on?

In relation to conflict, what is the scene's MDQ (major dramatic question)? What is the purpose of the scene? Why does the scene happen?

Identify any themes. How is theme dramatized in the story? What images come to mind with these identified themes? The more you can visualize the scene, the more interesting your blocking becomes.

Lastly, think about how this information affects the staging of the scene. Identify the moments in the scene when the plot determines movement. For example, when a character tells another character to sit down. Discuss your findings with your scene partner(s).

Read Two

- What clues are in the dialogue structure?
 - Word choice, punctuation, sentence type

The second read focuses on the structure of the dialogue. How a character's dialogue is constructed is a direct communication between the playwright and you. A character who ends most of their sentences with exclamation points has a different pace than a character who ends their sentences with ellipses. A character who speaks only in contractions is different than one who doesn't. Playwrights choose a character's dialogue structure carefully – punctuation, word choice, sentence length, contractions – these tools all contain vital information on how you should present your characters and your scene.

In Read Two, identify the types of words your characters use (and if they use contractions), the most common punctuation they use, and the types of sentences they use (fragments, monosyllabic, run-on sentences). Then reflect on what this information says about your characters.

When you've completed your tasks for Read Two, identify the moments when the structure of a line can propel movement. For example, maybe an exclamation point drives a character to stand. Discuss your findings with your scene partner(s).

Read Three

- Who is my character?
 - Personality, relationships, want, tactics, action, why

Read Three focuses on the content of the scene that's specific to your character. What are your character's personality traits? What is significant about your character's relationships in/out of the scene? (Make sure you read the whole play to learn further background information.) What action does your character take in the scene and why? What does your character want? What tactics does your character use to get what they want? Based on what you learn, write out a descriptive paragraph on your character. Who are they?

As with the previous reads, end Read Three by focusing on staging. Identify the moment where a character has to move, based on a want or tactic. Conversely, identify the moments in the scene where the character chooses to stay still, based on a want or tactic.

BLOCKING BRAINSTORM

- How can I physicalize this scene?
 - Character, story, structure

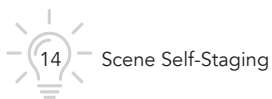
Now that you've analyzed the story, the structure, and your characters, there's one last question: How can I physicalize this scene? So many times, actors analyze their scene but don't take it to the next level and apply it to their staging. Scenes need to have blocking that is story-driven, character-driven, and structure-driven as opposed to moving randomly.

Take everything you've learned through your script analysis and write a descriptive paragraph that details how you're going to block the scene.

This doesn't mean these notes will turn into your final blocking, but it's important to have a place to start. Discuss your findings with your scene partner(s).

WANT TO PRACTICE?

Use the sample scene in Appendix Two from the play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Read it three times, use the provided worksheets, make notes, and write out your ideas for potential staging.



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Teaching Resources

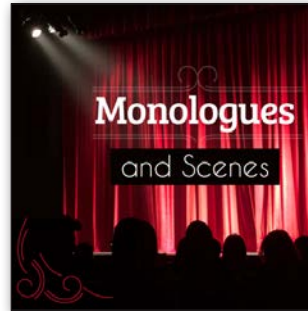
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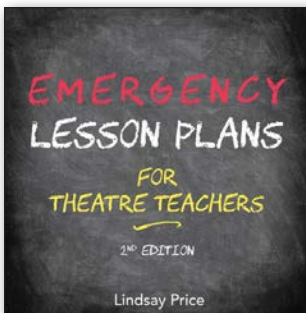


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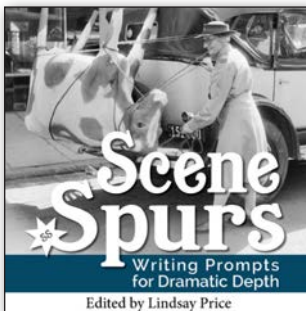
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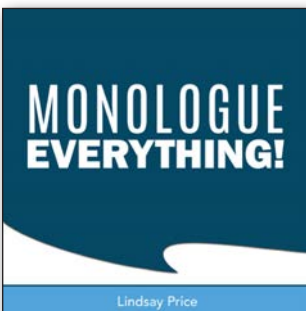


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