



## 2019 Georgia Thespian Conference Playworks Unit Plan

**Purpose:** To provide teachers and students with an outline of activities to develop original scripts suitable for submission to PlayWorks. The Unit Plan may be used in a classroom setting or by an independent small group or individual.

**Skills:** Each part of the Unit Plan focuses on a specific skill that young playwrights need to create successful scripts. The exercises within in section are selected to enhance and hone the skill- they may be used independently or as scaffolds to build upon. Each section ends with a Writing Task where a student can demonstrate mastery of the skills.

Part One- Strengthening Plot Structure  
Part Two- Capturing Unique Character Voice  
Part Three- Dynamic Dialogue  
Part Four- Pulling It Together

### Georgia Standards of Excellence Covered in Unit Plan:

Fundamentals of Theatre Levels I-IV:  
TAHSFT.CR.2 Develop scripts through theatrical techniques.  
<https://www.georgiastandards.org/Georgia-Standards/Documents/K-12-Theatre-Art-Standards.pdf> page 29.

The standards of 52.09200 Dramatic Writing (Film, Television, and Theatre I)  
<https://www.georgiastandards.org/Georgia-Standards/Documents/9-12-Dramatic-Writing-Course-Georgia-Standards.pdf>

## **Part One: Strengthening Plot Structure**

Plays, like novels and short stories, operate within an established structure. When playwrights are beginning to develop their plays they often will use a plot diagram known as a Freytag Model to lay out the basic idea for their play. In general the Freytag Model breaks down into 6 sections. We use *The Wizard of Oz* as an example for each section.

Exposition- The introduction of the characters and setting. (Meeting Dorothy, the unpleasant exchange with Miss Gulch, Dorothy's longing to go somewhere else)

Inciting Incident- The event that sets the rest of the action in motion. Without this event the rest of the play would not take place. (The tornado takes the house to Oz!)

Rising Action- The events that build momentum, presenting conflict and further developing character relationships. (Dorothy being sent on her quest to the Wizard; meeting Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion; the group being sent to kill the Wicked Witch)

Climax- The height of action and conflict or the turning point of the story. (Dorothy uses water to kill the Wicked Witch)

Falling Action- Events that occur after the climax. (Dorothy and friends return to the Wizard)

Denouement- Final resolution that ties up loose ends. (Dorothy returns to Kansas) (See analysis graphic organizer towards the end of this document.)

Strong plotlines have many things in common, despite differences in tone or genre. There is a momentum that keeps the plot moving from one point to the next. Usually this momentum is created by having characters with clear objectives that they are pursuing throughout the play. Strong plotlines also include meaningful conflict where multiple characters are invested in the outcome of the conflict.

(The exercises used in each of the unit parts are a combination of original explorations and those found in the source material referenced at the end)

### **Exercises:**

1. Yarn Ball Story. Have students sit in a circle in a large open space (such as on stage). Take a large ball of yarn and hold the end. Begin a basic story that is fairly open-ended; for example "I woke up late on Saturday morning and went downstairs when suddenly I saw...." Then throw the yarn ball to someone sitting across the circle from you. Remember to hold on to the end of the string before you throw the ball! The student

- holding the yarn ball adds to the story by introducing characters, events, and conflict. They can say two or three sentences, wrap the string around a finger, then toss the yarn ball to another student. This continues until everyone in the circle has contributed to the story. After the story is finished ask the class if this was a good plotline for a play. Generally the results are not good and ask the students to identify why. They will identify the weak areas (unclear focus or confusing characters, etc) and this will help them avoid making these same mistakes in their own plays.
2. **Make The Tea.** This is an improvisational game that focuses on having a clear beginning, middle, and end. Two actors are in a scene together where they can only say either “Yes,” “No,” or “Make the tea.” The actors have to listen and work together to keep a short scene going while only saying these three things. After the scene ends, discuss with the class how the focus of the scene changed so the audience knew what was happening. The exercise may be repeated with new students and new locations.
  3. **One Word Story:** Students should sit in a circle and attempt to tell a cohesive story while only stating one word at a time. With each student only having control over one word it will quickly become apparent that the class must work together to listen to others and help to craft a play with what is presented rather than pushing through individual agendas or simply waiting until ones own turn to participate. A discussion about inciting incidents, rising action, climax, and resolution after a few failures goes a long way to helping the class become successful in completing a story.
  4. **Writing Task:** Story of a Journey. This is a full class activity. The teacher should divide the class up into 4 relatively equal groups. The groups should have one writer to record for the group. They should have enough space so the groups do not overhear each other. The groups will be responsible for creating one aspect of a story but they are creating their aspect independent of one another.
    - a. **Group One-** Describe three different locations where events could take place. Go into detail for each section (weather, time of day, etc)
    - b. **Group Two-** Describe two original characters. Give them names and a physical description and determine a character “goal.” This can be a simple goal like “Go to the grocery store” or it can be a more complex goal like “Discover a new life form.”
    - c. **Group Three-** Determine a conflict that two characters could get into through the course of a day.
    - d. **Group Four-** Determine a resolution or ending for a story.
- After a few minutes for the groups to plan, come back together as a large group and share what they have developed. Work to integrate the different sections into a cohesive plot (as much as this is possible—some “tweaking” of different sections may be required). Use the first location for the beginning, the second location for the middle, and the final

location for the ending. Add other characters as needed. Once the i is clearly established, ask students to choose a section from the plot and write the dialogue for that section. This activity is a good transition into writing actual dialogue and it would be a good opportunity to discuss formatting of scripts (colons before dialogue, italicized stage directions, etc). After the writing period, have students share their scripts in small groups or with the class as a whole.

## **Part Two: Capturing Unique Character Voice**

Once student playwrights have a sense of plot structure the next step is to teach students how to maximize the impact of their dialogue to show the personalities of the characters they are creating. A pitfall for young playwrights is that all the characters in a play sound the same (often like the playwright!) so these exercises are geared toward building their skills in the area of character voice. The exercises may be used independently or with characters the students have created in earlier activities.

As a group, ask the students how we can make characters "sound" different from one another. They may say things like word choice, use of slang, short vs long sentences, use of metaphors, sad vs happy emotional states, etc. Create a list on the board of the suggestions from the class. Ask students to choose two of the characteristics listed on the board and create a 6-line dialogue between two characters (three lines each) where the focus is bringing out the specific chosen characteristic. The students should share their dialogues with the group and see if the audience could identify which two dialogue characteristics the playwright chose. Explain how playwrights use language to show us details of a character's emotional state as well as moving the plot along.

### **Exercises:**

1. **Gibberish Scene.** Use the Improvisation game known as Gibberish Scene (where two performers go through a scene but do not use any recognizable language). The performers can determine their relationship/location/objectives but they should keep those secret from the rest of the class. The audience should watch the scene then write on their own paper what they believed the two characters in the scene were talking about. Any movement or blocking the performers used should be consistent in the written scenes. The students should write the dialogue for this new scene, making sure to maintain the blocking that the performers used. Students should continue to work on creating a unique voice for each character.

2. **Prompted Lines.** Write a selection of "opening lines" on the board for the students to see. Ask them to choose one and write it as the first line of dialogue for a two-person scene. The goal of this scene is to show the audience a relationship between two characters without using labels ("mom," "sis," "boss," etc). Students should try to capture how people in different relationships and statuses speak to one another. The scene should be one page in length. When the students are done writing they should share the scenes and see if they can identify the relationship between the unnamed characters.

3. **Writing Task:** Characters from Photos. This activity requires a selection of photos that show people (non-celebrities) in a variety of different locations. I recommend using ads from several different

magazines. Students should look through the pictures and choose one that appeals to them. Next they should spend some time determining some things about the person in the photo. Describe their personality, occupation, immediate goals, etc. Then have the students decide how this person speaks. They should really go through the steps to make specific decisions about how this character speaks-- the more detailed and specific they can be in this step the easier it will be to create the characters voice. Ask the student to write a monologue from the point-of-view of their character. The character can be speaking to another character or directly to the audience. Ask the students to look for opportunities to show their mastery of the characters' voice. \*\*This monologue is suitable for submission to Georgia Thespian PlayWorks, but cannot be submitted to international.\*\*

### **Part Three: Dynamic Dialogue**

This section focuses on creating clear character objectives and writing dialogue where characters pursue those objectives aggressively. Make sure that students understand objectives, tactics, and obstacles as they pertain to acting.

Objective- A specific desire of a character within a scene. This desire drives the character to speak and interact with others.

Tactic- Decisions and interactions characters have to achieve their objectives. Characters can use multiple tactics to achieve the same objective.

Obstacles- Characters or events that stand in the way of a character achieving their objectives.

In scenes with dynamic dialogue there is a high level of importance for all characters in achieving their objectives. We refer to this as the "stakes" of a scene. Characters have to have a sense of urgency and a need to achieve their objectives; if it isn't important to the character, it's certainly not going to matter to the audience. If dialogue is feeling stale, ask the playwright to raise the stakes for the characters in the scene.

#### **Exercises:**

1. Gimme the Cookie. This exercise helps students identify and utilize different tactics within the dialogue of a scene. They can have two characters that both want the last cookie on a cookie tray. Using creative, non-violent tactics, have the characters attempt to convince one another that they deserve the cookie. The scene is over when one character achieves the objective of getting the cookie.
2. "I've Got A Secret" Scene. Ask students to write a two-person dialogue where one character has an objective they do not want to disclose to the other character. However the character with the secret objective should still pursue it actively within the context of the scene.
3. The Alternate Ending. Briefly discuss the plots of several fairy tales or folk tales that are familiar to the students in the class. Ask the students to create an alternate ending for the fairy tale and to write the dialogue for that scene.
4. **Writing Task:** Have the students improvise a short scene for the class where a character is "breaking up" with an unseen character on the telephone (so the audience only hears one side of the conversation). Then have small groups re-write the scene using the same two characters but in a public place. The objective of the original character is still to end the relationship but it is complicated by the obstacle of the other character's desire to stay together. Stress

using the physical environment to create additional tension and conflict. Share the dialogues and discuss how different tactics were used in different scenes.

## **Part Four: Pulling It Together**

Now that the students have explored many of the tools of the playwright the next step is to make it all work in a single play. This can be done in the form of a playwriting competition or simply as an in class exercise. With beginning level classes it is often best to work with small groups rather than jumping in to a single student writing alone. The outline below is just one of many approaches to completing the task of writing a play in class.

Suggested outline for in class playwriting project:

### **Phase One: Genres, Perspectives, and Purpose**

Students or groups should begin by determining what genre of play they wish to write, comedy, drama, docudrama, classical tragedy and so on. In order to help spur this conversation it is often helpful to discuss the types of audiences students might want to address. From here the groups are encouraged settle on a subject or perspective they wish to drive the plot. Research into similar genres and styles should be encouraged. If time permits student groups should actually read and discuss within their groups scenes from plays that fit the styles they are interested in writing

Once this is outlined students will already have begun to discuss possibilities for the aspects of dramatic story telling such as character types, settings, and potential events. Students should be encouraged to use this group brainstorming to develop one or two outlines of solid plot possibilities. This does not need to include all of the scenes in the rising or falling action or even the details of what occurs to cause the climax, but rather the simplest description of the turning point moments, inciting incident, climactic point, general idea of final resolve.

### **Phase Two: Events, Acts, Scenes, and Characters**

During phase two the groups should discuss all of the possible events they would like to include in order to accomplish arriving at the previously discussed plot points. Students should think in terms of locations and actions. While classes should be reminded that playwriting is not the same a screenwriting, students should not be discouraged from thinking outside the box in writing the "impossible" scene. Creative dramatic dialogue can go a very long way to achieve seemingly impossible goals. Once the actions have been determined it is time to divide the events into acts and scenes. At this point, out of necessity, students will have begun to discuss characters that will be needed in this series of events. This cast should be fleshed out and discussed in a very similar manner to the character analysis explorations done by actors preparing a role.

### **Phase Three: Dialogue**

Using writing exercises from earlier in the unit such as drafting monologues from the perspectives of particular characters or Improvising scenes and confrontations that must occur in the script, the students should spend the next several days coming up with active dialogue from the unique voice of specific characters for each scene. With more inexperienced playwrights dividing and conquering is key. As scenes are written they should be read aloud and discussed in terms of what works well as an active dramatic scene and what could be improved. Each scene should be written, discussed, and rewritten prior to assembling them together as a complete play. At this point it is a good idea to pair up groups for feedback outside of people developing this particular story. Questions should be asked in terms of scene clarity, fluidity of dialogue, and maintaining clear unified goals from scene to scene.

#### Phase Four: First Shared Readings

Students should rehearse a reading of the finished script in front of a live informed audience. Each character should be played by different actors if possible. In addition all stage directions and scene titles should be read aloud. At the end of the reading a guided talk back should occur covering different aspects of the play. The moderator should ask the audience to discuss the following topics: clarity of plot, pacing, appropriateness of dialogue for genre, defined objectives of characters, and suggestions for improvement. It is also a good idea to time each category in order to be sure to give full weight to each and to stay on topic from one to the next. If there is more to be said after a time limit this could be addressed at the end.

#### Phase Five: Rewrites

At this point students should work on rewriting scripts based on the feedback from the first shared reads. It is important during this phase that the playwrights do not cave to the suggestions at the cost of giving up unique perspectives. Stage four and five can be repeated as often as necessary to solidify a final script.

**\*\*While the group project format is a great way to expose students to playwriting in class, only individual projects can be submitted to Georgia PlayWorks.\*\***

# Additional Resources and Source Material

## Online Resources:

### Teaching Playwriting in Schools.

This is an excellent tool from CenterStage Theatre with writing exercises and notes geared towards middle and high school student writers. There is a handy section about avoiding pitfalls of rookie playwriting that was especially helpful to my high school students.

<http://www.centerstage.org/Portals/0/PDF/06PlaywrightsHandbook.pdf>

### Playwriting 101.

This online resource comes from Jonathan Dorf and it focuses on proper formatting and plot structure. It also has helpful tips on getting new scripts produced.

<http://www.playwriting101.com/>

### Theatre Education Lesson Plans: Introduction to Playwriting.

From Brigham Young University's online lesson plan database.

<http://tedb.byu.edu/unit/show?id=10>

## Print Resources:

### The Playwright's Workbook by Jean-Claude Italie

This series of writing prompts and exercises helps new and emerging playwrights define their written voice and create memorable plots and characters.

[http://www.amazon.com/The-Playwrights-Workbook-Jean-Claude-Italie/dp/1557833028/ref=pd\\_sim\\_sbs\\_b\\_5](http://www.amazon.com/The-Playwrights-Workbook-Jean-Claude-Italie/dp/1557833028/ref=pd_sim_sbs_b_5)

### The Playwright's Guidebook by Stuart Spencer

Another quality resource for student playwrights. This book offers more writing prompts that build on one another. It also offers suggestions where students might find "inspiration" in their own lives for dramatic content.

[http://www.amazon.com/Playwrights-Guidebook-Insightful-Dramatic-Writing/dp/0571199917/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1347667287&sr=1-2&keywords=Playwriting](http://www.amazon.com/Playwrights-Guidebook-Insightful-Dramatic-Writing/dp/0571199917/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1347667287&sr=1-2&keywords=Playwriting)

### The Playwright's Process by Buzz McLaughlin

This book uses interviews from famous playwrights to discuss the craft of playwriting. It has an amazing set of Prompted Scenes for young playwrights to work on dialogue, subtext, and pacing. I highly recommend this book.  
<http://www.amazon.com/The-Playwrights-Process-Learning-Dramatists/dp/0823088332>

This PlayWorks Unit Plan was written and compiled by Emily McClain of Archer High School, Gwinnett County, GA and Paul McClain of Northview High School, Fulton County, GA

Suggested Playwrights and Works for Analysis:

Historical Artists:

- ♣ Sophocles
- ♣ Euripides
- ♣ Aristophanes
- ♣ William Shakespeare
- ♣ Moliere
- ♣ Henrik Ibsen
- ♣ Anton Chekov
- ♣ Oscar Wilde
- ♣ George Bernard Shaw

Contemporary Artists:

- ♣ Eugene Ionesco
- ♣ Eugene O'Neill
- ♣ Tennessee Williams
- ♣ Arthur Miller
- ♣ William Inge
- ♣ Lorraine Hansberry
- ♣ Federico Garcia Lorca
- ♣ Edward Albee
- ♣ August Wilson
- ♣ Neil Simon
- ♣ David Mamet
- ♣ Marsha Norman
- ♣ John Patrick Shanley
- ♣ Beth Henley
- ♣ Yasmina Reza
- ♣ Tracy Letts

# 2019 Georgia Thespian Conference Playworks Script Formatting Requirements

## Script Formats

\*Include a Title Page that contains the name of your play, your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address (if you have one). Also provide the name of the school and your grade.

\* Include a Cast List page, which briefly describes the characters.

*The Title Page and the Cast List page don't count as one of your pages of script.*

***It is suggested that you use one of the following formats for your one act play:***

## Format 1:

Set the scene in a paragraph formatted this way. Two or three sentences should suffice to give us the idea. It could also contain brief character descriptions or describe an action of one of your characters.

PERSON 1: Says something in dialogue formatted like this, which could carry over in the form of a hanging indent.

PERSON 2: *(Off)* Sounds great!

PERSON 1: *(looks around)* Perfect.

*She looks at the ocean and begins to hum a song.*

## Format 2:

*It is also acceptable to use screenplay format for your play. The following is an example of a play script using the basic screenplay format:*

The action takes place in a renovated barn on the Nova Scotia seacoast. The place has been turned into a loft-like living area, with a kitchen and bathroom off to one side.

LENNY appears at the front door and knocks...

JAMES walks slowly out of the bathroom and notices LENNY with a "hey you're here, all right!" sort of gesture, then crosses to the front door and opens it.

LENNY  
Hi Dad.

JAMES  
Hey! How ya' doin'?

LENNY  
Fine. How're you?

JAMES  
Finest kind. Finest, finest kind. (Pause)  
That your suitcase?

LENNY  
Yeah.

JAMES takes LENNY'S suitcase.

JAMES  
It's great to have ya' here!

JAMES exits into one of the bedrooms...

JAMES  
(from off)  
How was the drive?

LENNY puts his guitar case down, as JAMES re-appears.

JAMES  
How was the drive man?

LENNY  
I left the city, and I drove here. It was fine.

JAMES and LENNY look at each other for a second, not sure what to say next... ETC

