

Unit:

Playwriting

Overview

Grades:

9th - 12th

Class Sessions:

6 weeks/daily

Teacher:

Caitlin Barton

School:

Brooklyn
School for
Global Studies

Benchmarks:

- Students increase their range of expression as playwrights through the use of vocabulary and dramatic structure, and by exploring various theatrical styles and forms.
- Students apply elements of research, imagination and revision in their dramatic writing.
- Working alone and in groups, students begin to recognize and articulate their personal vision and the cultural context of their work.

Project Description

Students will create a short play based on a conflict.

Big Ideas

Students will make connections between real life conflicts and dramatized fictional characters and stories.

This can lead to the essential question: How can playwriting a short conflict scene help students to understand the ability to make different choices in problems in their own lives?

Instructional Goal

Students will be able to choose situations about which to write and create dialogue between characters showing an ability to perceive different points of view in conflict situations.

Knowledge/Skill Indicators

Students will know:

- What is a conflict scene
- What is a resolution
- What is dramatic structure and plot
- What is dialogue
- What is a character
- What is a short play

Students will be able to:

- Recognize and choose a conflict about which to write.
- Understand the importance of character development in relation to the creation of a story or play.
- Demonstrate a solid understanding of rising action, climax, resolution and the dramatic arc of a play while focusing on their chosen conflict/topic.
- Revise, refine and edit a play.

Students will understand:

- The basics of playwriting.
- How to create dialogue for different characters.
- How conflict in our lives can be interpreted into playwriting.

Essential Questions

How can a conflict in our lives be interpreted into a written play?

How can we write a short play effectively?

How do we use dialogue to create conflict between characters?

Unit: **Playwriting** Continued

Assessments and Learning Experiences

Pre-Assessment/Planning

- Have I taught these students before?
- What do students already know and understand about this area of theater making?
Basic acting/improv skills
Some exposure to theater.
- What skills related to this unit have students already developed?
Improvising conflicts in scenes
Working on dialogue in improvisation
Analyzing conflict in plays
- How will the students' needs be addressed?
Students will create conflict topics that speak to them.
Students will have the option to write in pairs if they work better with others.
Students will have the opportunity to write in class, instead of giving homework.

Assessment Strategies: Evidence of Student Learning

Self-Assessment

- Students will understand checklist/rubric required for writing (and performing) an effective conflict scene.

Peer Assessment

- Through observation and discussion
- Through use of a checklist for describing and evaluating presentation
- Workshopping each play based on checklist requirements

Teacher Assessment

- Through use of a rubric for describing and evaluating rehearsal and presentation
- Through peer assessment observations

Learning Experiences

Theater Strands

	<i>making</i>	<i>literacy</i>	<i>connections</i>	<i>resources</i>	<i>careers</i>
Improv exercises to generate conflict ideas.	◆	◆	◆		
Use frozen tableaux to start dialogue	◆	◆	◆		
Compare conflicts in other professionally written plays.	◆	◆	◆		
Generate conflict idea brainstorm list.	◆	◆	◆	◆	
Show movie or after-school TV show that has clear conflict story.	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Write plays. (And type them)	◆	◆	◆		
Create graphic representation/storyboard of plot summary.	◆	◆	◆		
Share, read and analyze plays aloud in class.	◆	◆	◆		
Rehearse and present plays as a separate project.	◆	◆	◆		
Go see a play that has a good conflict throughout.	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

Unit: **Playwriting** Continued

Student Work



Example of Conflict Play

Shop Lifting

By: J. Jibreel, 9th Grade

Characters:

Ja'bari- age 14

Jannah- age 14

Stacey- age 14

Mister & Mrs. Alexander- ages 40 and 39

Conflict:

Ja'bari, his girlfriend Stacey and his sister Jannah go shopping in the mall. Stacey, who couldn't afford some earrings, slips it into Jannah's bag and gets in trouble. And since Ja'bari saw every thing happen, he must choose between ratting out his girlfriend or letting his sister take the blame.

Scene:

Takes place at the mall (scene 1)

At home (scene 2)

At school (scene 3)

Stacey: Hey Jay-Jay look at these earrings. I really, really like them. Can you buy them for me?

Ja'bari: Awe sorry, I can't I just spent the last of my money to buy me this game for my PS3. You can ask Jannah.

Stacey: I'm good. (With attitude)

Jannah: Hey Jay-jay come over here look at these. You'd so like 'em.

(Ja'bari leaves to see Jannah and Stacey slips the earrings in her pocket.)

Stacey: Oh, sorry Jannah, I didn't mean to bump in to you (as she now slips the earrings into Jannah's bag).

Jannah: Hey watch it; you just scratched my wrist (as they now go to the door).

Ja'bari: What was that!?

Stacey: Oh nothing.

Jannah: Its okay I only scratched my wrist. What were you going for, my bag, Stacey? (A little angry)

Stacey: Hey, my bad! (Angry)

Ja'bari: Chill out, lets just go now. (As they walk to the door)

(BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP-The alarm goes off)

Unit: **Playwriting** *Continued*

Student Work

Example of Conflict Play *continued*

Security guard:

Excuse me, miss, can I check your bag?

Jannah: Sure, mister, there's nothing I took or anything.

Security Guard:

We got some jeans, some shirts, shoes, and – look it here, some very expensive earrings. That doesn't look paid for. And I don't see it on your receipt. Miss, you're coming with me.

Stacey: Oh, Jannah, why did you do such a thing?

Later that day at home (scene 2)...

Jannah: Oh my god, I can't believe I've been banded from a mall. Who the hell gets banded from a mall?

Mr. Alexander:

Listen Jannah, you watch it now. Maybe next time you'll learn not to be a convict.

Jannah: Convict? Hold on now, I'm not a convict.

Ms. Alexander:

Watch your mouth and the way you talk to us, some time you can just never keep out of trouble. Just go up to your room.

(Jannah heads up to her room.)

Ja'bari: Hey Jannah are you okay?

Jannah: I didn't do it Jay-jay, I don't now how it got in the bag.

Ja'bari: Well are you sure you didn't do it by accident.

Jannah: I bet Stacey did it; you and her were looking at them.

Ja'bari: Hey, how come you're blaming it on her, it could've been me.

Jannah: You're the worse liar that I know, not also to mention why would you want to get in trouble? So spill it. You and your girl friend were looking at the jewelry when some- how it got into my bag.

Ja'bari: Okay, okay I and Stacey were looking at the jewelry, and then before we left the store and she bumped in to you, I saw her drop something.

Jannah: That freaking convict got me in trouble and you were about to take the blame for her instead of me, your own flesh and blood. You better do some thing about this before I tell mom and dad. You really just hurt me Ja'bari.

Ja'bari: Okay I will do something tomorrow about this at school.

Unit: **Playwriting** *Continued*

Student Work

Example of Conflict Play *continued*

Next day at school (scene 3)...

Ja'bari: Yo Stacey wait up, we got to talk.

Stacey: What's wrong, don't tell me your sister did something. (Laughing)

Ja'bari: No it's about what you did to her. I saw you put the earrings in her bag after me and you were looking at them. Just come clean before more drama happens.

(Jannah comes into the scene.)

Jannah: I know I didn't touch the jewelry and Jay-jay knows I wasn't any where near it.

Stacey: I can't believe you Ja'bari How could you just set me up like this.

Ja'bari: It wasn't a set up; just tell, I'm not choosing any one over any one.

Stacey: I thought you were my boy friend/

Ja'bari: And I thought you were my girl friend.

Stacey: Okay, okay, I'll tell I did sneak it in to your bag I wanted them so bad and you just kept on bugging me and Ja'bari.

Jannah: First of all me and Ja'bari invited you and if I was interrupting you guys you just had to tell me.

Stacey: Okay I'm sorry, and I'll tell your parents what I did and clear this out. I'm sorry Ja'bari and Jannah.

Ja'bari: Its okay we'll work things out.

Jannah: Now let's go.

... And soon Ja'bari, Jannah, and Stacey cleared every thing up and worked the conflict out.

Unit: **Playwriting** Continued

Playwriting Template

This gives a simple format for the writing and typing of the play. All details listed should be included in the final draft of the play.

Name:

Class:

Teacher:

Date:

Title of Play:

Characters:

A:

B:

Setting: Where scene takes place

At Rise:

This tells the stage directions at beginning of the play indicating where the characters are at the beginning of the play.

Stage directions should be used throughout the play in the following ways:

1. Describe setting and characters
2. Tell actor
 - a. where to move
 - b. how to say something
 - c. what to do/how to act

Character1: Dialogue (no quotation marks.)(This is the person talking)

Character 2: Dialogue (This is another person talking.)

The play should have a clear beginning, middle (climax of the problem), and ending (resolution.)

The resolution may not necessarily solve the problem, but it is an ending. There should be an arc from the beginning to the middle and to the end.

Unit: **Playwriting** Continued

Performance Checklist

The following are requirements for an outstanding performance:

Be off book (no script, know your lines and stage directions.)

Scene should be rehearsed prior to performing it.

Set up stage picture

- Props
- Set

Work well with scene partner

- Make eye contact where appropriate in the scene
- Speak to the other actors on stage.
- If someone messes up a line, work with your scene partner, help him/her out, work together like a team.

Project voice.

Know the objectives of your character.

- Who is character talking to?
- What is character trying to do or get from other character? (character objective)

Fully embody character.

- Know the emotion of your character.
- Be able to step into the character's shoes/situation.

Caitlin Barton, Theater Teacher Observations

I taught a playwriting unit in all of my classes with grades 9-12. The unit plan focuses on the 10th grade class. We focused on conflict scenes. The students had the freedom to create their own scenarios. Prior to the playwriting unit, I taught an improv unit, so the students had the opportunity to explore different conflicts through the improv scenes. As reference material, the students read and acted out basic conflict scenes from conflict resolution books. We worked on the many different conflict scenes throughout the semester so the students had good reference points on which to base their ideas and particularly to show the dramatic structure of a scene or short play. We created brainstorm lists about different types of conflicts in life and between people.

After this preparation, all the students could easily create ideas for writing their own conflict scenes. Some unexpected outcomes were the intensity and personal ties of the conflicts in the plays to some of the students' lives. Some students used their imaginations to create very believable conflict scenes, which they claim have very little to do with their own personal lives, for examples, plays about suicide, drugs, pregnancy, etc. Other students wrote about very personal topics and they did not deny that they knew something of the topic; for example dating and domestic abuse.

Because I was working with numerous students who had little to no prior knowledge of theater or theater going, and many students who had IEPs (Individualized Education Plans), who were working at a variety of learning levels, I chose to use learning activities and materials that were very accessible and understandable to everyone. Everyone can relate to conflicts in life, around them or in their own lives. Everyone can understand dialogue between two people talking about a conflict or problem. I made sure to expose all the students in my classes to the theater, regardless of their progress in the class. I took them to see four theater shows over the course of the year, two shows in the fall and two in the spring.

I had to quickly adapt my previously created theater unit plans and change the course of direction for many of my lessons mostly due to the vast array of learning levels of the students in my classes. I feel very good about the focus on conflict scenes, as it gave students an opportunity to act out their scenes and offered them the chance to create their own plays. Every student could relate to the topics and everyone seemed to enjoy diving into conflict scenes. Based on some of the cohort response and in keeping with my own line of inquiry I would like to continue to ask the following essential question: How to quickly incorporate new, innovative learning activities when a theater unit changes in mid-course?

