

Introduction to Theatre

Creating Given Circumstances for Playwriting

Overview:

This lesson is the beginning of a four week Playwriting unit that will take the students through the process of writing, workshopping, and re-writing an original script. This lesson will walk the students through the process of creating the given circumstances or background information of their play's story. In order to help the students feel comfortable enough to take big artistic risks, their location choices have been limited by having them pick from real-life environments as described in the Grounds 4 Inspiration website. Other than limiting their location, the students will have creative license to make whatever creative choices they would like for their scenes as long as it is logical to the world they have created in their play and school appropriate.

Standards Addressed:

- **9-12.RT.4** – Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific technical theatre context relevant to *grades 9-12 texts and topics*.
- **9-2.WT.4** – Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **H.3.1: PROFICIENT** – Articulate understanding of a play using elements of dramatic structure (plot, character, theme, language, music, and spectacle).
- **H.6.1: PROFICIENT** – Construct imaginative scripts and collaborate with actors to refine scripts so that the story and meaning are conveyed to an audience.

Objectives:

- The students will be able to define the given circumstances of a play.
- The students will be able to create a set of given circumstances for an original story.
- The students will be able to describe the impact that an environment has on the action of a play.

Materials Needed:

- Access to computers
- Ground for Inspiration website
- “5 Ws of Playwriting” handout
- Chalk/dry erase board
- Chalk/expo markers

Procedure:

- **Journal Question and Discussion of Student Responses (10 min.)**
 - What are given circumstances?
 - How do playwrights decide the given circumstances of their plays?
 - How does changing the environment of a story change that story?
 - Allow the students 5 minutes to write and then bring the group back together to discuss their responses for 5 minutes.
- **Introduction to Playwriting Scenes and Individual Work Time (35 min.)**
 - We will be writing a short scene over the course of the next couple of weeks. The first thing we need to do is set up the given circumstances for your story (the world in which your story will live).
 - **Basics of your scene:**
 - 2-character minimum
 - Select the setting of your scene from the landscape descriptions found at <https://www.ground4inspiration.net/>
 - Consider what happened leading up to the moment that your scene is starting (**Stasis A**).
 - When you have your location, raise your hand and tell Ms. Buescher. Once she has approved your location, complete the “5 W’s of Playwriting” handout.
 - **Answer the 5 W’s:**
 - **Who** are your **characters**?
 - **What** do they want (**their objective**), and what is in their way?
 - **When** is your story taking place?
 - *Time period of the play (90s, 1800s, **post-apocalyptic – hypothetical year please!**)*
 - *How long does the story take from beginning to end? (months, days, years, hours)*
 - **Where** is it taking place?
 - *One location or many? – the number of locations will be a factor in how long the time that this story can logically take place in*
 - *How does the environment act on the characters and the scene? Is it a plot device? An obstacle to their objective?*
 - **Why** is this so important to your character?
 - *What will happen if they don’t achieve their objective? (**stakes**)*
 - **Individual Work Time:** About 20 minutes to work individually and then we will share a bit of the given circumstances you have written.

- **Conclusion (5 min.)**
 - 2 people can share what they have written and open their answers up to 3 class questions/constructive criticism for each person sharing
 - Class Discussion Questions:
 - **How do you see the environment acting on people in your daily lives?**
 - **How could you employ that in your scene?**
 - Next class: Start playing with storyboarding your scenes and the Pixar story structure as a tool for script analysis

Assignment:

- **For next class:** please brainstorm at least 2 possible endings for your scene

Assessment:

- **Formative:** Concluding Discussion and periodic checks for understanding
- **Summative:** “5 Ws of Playwriting” handout (completion, following instructions, and logical story components), Journal Entry (completion and thought), and Ensemble Point (participation and respect)

Self-Evaluation:

- Did I get through everything that I had planned? If not, what took too long? If yes, was there too much time leftover?
- Were my instructions clear? How many people had to ask clarifying questions about the basic instructions for the activity?
- Were the students engaged in the activity and the discussion of given circumstances and world building? If not, how could I make that more engaging?