

October 23, 2020

## ABCDE WORKSHOP

### INTRODUCING PLAYWRITING IN THE CLASSROOM

- INTRO: land acknowledgment, plan for the morning.
- PLAYWRITING IN THE CLASSROOM;
  - If you're asking students to write a play, help them out by given them clear parameters before they dive in. Length, number of characters, number of locations.
  - Writing a play is a substantial undertaking. Give them time.
  - Do some work before they dive into writing around helping them focus on subject matter that matters to them. Encourage a bit of journalling or exercises that draw out things that they are passionate about. What you want is to help them focus in on something that maintains their intrigue, something they are passionate about, you want them to have a personal connection to the subject matter.
  - EXERCISES: 1. "I am..." Mind dump, stream of consciousness free write. "I am" descriptors, and "I am" metaphors. Can lead them to protagonist definition and can help them write from a place they know. 2. "Obsessions List": list what you're obsessed with: ideas, food, people, shows. 3. List five things you don't understand. You can devise your own exercises that help them unpack what they care about. (Write a bio for a character. Write a monologue for a character, use that character to build your play.)

### QUESTIONS

- WRITING ACTION/WRITING A PLAY
  - One of the hardest things to teach is how to write action. Action is what sets this form apart from others. A play must be active in order for it to be called a play.
  - Action is generated through character. Action is a character wanting something, fighting to get that thing and the obstacles that prevent that from happening, and the strategies the character employ to get around obstacles. Generally, plays follow a single protagonist as they fight for what they want and either get it or don't. Teaching this concept is hard.
  - WANTS EXERCISE: This help distill action writing down to simple wants and also helps create subtext in a scene.
    - The students work in pairs.
    - They write two person scenes.
    - They will each write the dialogue for one character back and forth.
    - Write down a bunch of 'wants' on pieces of paper. Ask each student to select one without showing it to the other student
    - Write down a list of 'situations' that involve two people: buying a coffee, sending food back at a restaurant, applying for a loan, asking for directions, etc. and give each pair of students one of the scenarios.
  - RULES: They decide on who is writing which character in the scenario. Then they each write one line of dialogue at a time and alternate back and forth that way. If they choose they can add a stage direction instead of a line of dialogue. They build the scene that way. They cannot explicitly say what their want is! They must have the character's want motivate their behaviour and the goal is to have the classroom guess what the want of their character is. The character does not need to 'get what they want' in order for the scene to be successful. The point of the exercise is the create a scene where the character is being motivated by a desire for something, and then to be able to talk about what that did to the scene afterward. What strategies did they employ in order to get the character what they wanted.

- Keep the scenes short, about two pages.
- Make sure you ask the students to read them all out loud.

## QUESTIONS

- **PLAY DEVELOPMENT**
  - Plays are not just written, they are developed. Make room in your classroom for generating several drafts of a play. Encourage messiness, and unformed first drafts.
  - Introduce the idea early on, that several drafts will be generated. This will vary from person to person, but the understanding is that a play must live and breathe as it grows. Give example of baby needing to grow up. Encourage your students to embrace rewriting.
  - Always read plays out loud. This can be time consuming, but this is the best and only real way of understanding what a play is and what it needs. It provides much more useful information to the student than just getting feedback from you. It also makes it easier for you to assess what the play is doing.
  - Implement a safe and supportive model of group dramaturgy. This model works best with a smaller group, but can also be used if you break up your class of 25 or 30 into groups of 10 or so.
  - **HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK:** establish a rule or guideline that avoids the use of all evaluative language. No “like, love, good, bad, weak, strong, etc.”
    - Talk about what that language does to the classroom and to the individual, ego breaking or boosting, not a valuable part of the conversation at this point.
    - Instead, give feedback in two categories: what is VIVID or RESONANT in the writing. What is UNCLEAR. Offer this in the form of a question. Offer them as lists. The first gives them sense of what is landing, what is reaching the audience. The second gives them a sense of where they need to focus their rewrites. As part of the ‘vivid’ category, encourage the reporting of emotional response. This is really useful.
    - Encourage the students to become active listeners and monitor their emotional responses to what is happening during a reading. That is what we’re looking for: I felt sad, disgusted, joyful, scared, etc.\
    - You’ll notice that some students really take to this model and become really good at offering excellent clarity questions
- Now what? Depending on your plan, you can have the group select a number of plays for further exploration and development. I would recommend that a play go through at least 3 drafts before it is presented.

## QUESTIONS