

WRITING
THE STORIES OF
OUR NATION



A PROJECT LED BY THE
ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
AND OUR 12 PARTNER THEATRES
ACROSS THE COUNTRY

37 PLAYS

ABOUT 37 PLAYS

37 Plays is a new, nationwide playwriting project led by the RSC and their 12 theatre partners across the country. Its aim is to get the nation writing. The RSC is inviting children, young people and adults, including established, emerging and first-time writers, to write the comedies, tragedies, and untold histories of our time.

ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack is designed to assist teachers in encouraging their students to explore playwriting, either for the first time or to further existing creative writing experience. It offers a three-week plan to help students take their first steps in writing their own play, from finding a story and creating characters, to writing dialogue and exploring play structure. There are additional extension activities to continue work beyond this three-week period, or you can pick and choose from the activities to fill one-off lessons.

Each section is packed full of tips and links to short films from existing playwrights, offering practical advice on where to start. These tips are backed up by activities to do both in the classroom, individually and in groups, or to take home and develop further in their own time. At the end of the three weeks, students should have a working knowledge of story, character, dialogue, plot and structure, which are the cornerstones of playwriting, and be in an excellent position to try writing a play of their own!

This pack will be followed by another further on in the year, to develop deeper work such as formatting, redrafting and staging play readings, where they can hear their work-in-progress out loud.

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These symbols are used throughout the pack:



READ

Tips from writers, background info or extracts



ACTIVITY

A practical or open space activity



WRITE

A writing or discussion activity



LINKS

Useful web addresses research tasks

WEEK 1.

STORY: HOOK & WORLD

WHAT CAN I WRITE A PLAY ABOUT?

The answer is **ANYTHING REALLY!** You can write about what you know: *your life, hobby, family or friends...* OR you can dream up a different world entirely. It's up to you. Shakespeare frequently stole story ideas from history books and often changed the facts to suit his ideas!

HOWEVER, sometimes 'ANYTHING' can seem daunting and it can be good to narrow your choices down. We asked the playwrights that are working on the 37 Plays Project to share their advice...

"Choose an idea you care about and feel excited about. Begin with an idea you want to spend the weekend with!"

"Listen to podcasts, the news, watch documentaries, use the stories of NOW."

"Go see a live play, live outside your desk and head!"

"Write better versions of things you like and cut out the bits you don't like. After all, that's what Shakespeare did!"

Playwriting, just like a book, film, cartoon or TV programme, is a form of storytelling. There are millions of stories out there, many of them untold. So how do we find the story we want to tell? Is it something we already know and are interested in, or is it a subject that is still out there waiting for us to discover? And once we have our story, what do we do with it?!

This first section (WEEK1) is designed to assist and inspire students to find their story and is divided into 2 parts:

A) The Hook: an idea that excites you or 'hooks' you into exploring it further.

B) The World: deciding on a setting or 'world' for this idea to live in.

A) HOOK

A good story has at least one element that gets us 'hooked.' It's the bit they put in the trailer of a movie or on the back of the novel to entice the reader to buy it. So at this stage, we don't need to know our whole story, we just need to find the trigger, the Big Idea, the central question, the thing that sparks our interest: the HOOK!



Activity 1. What's Out There?

"Check out a newspaper feature, a tweet or a social media post that surprises or shocks you. You may see something that excites you or makes your blood boil. I certainly see a lot of things that take my breath away in good ways and bad."

- Juliet Gilkes Romero, playwright.

The following storytelling activity is designed to help students work collaboratively to find inspiration from the world around them, such as other people, the news, even history. Younger or less experienced writers might benefit from watching a youth news programme such as Newsround in the weeks leading up to this and discussing previous learning in history. [You will need: pens and big sheets of paper, tablet with internet access to play short film trailer below.]

- Watch this short film trailer 'Find the Story' (<https://37plays.co.uk/resources>), in which playwright, Juliet Gilkes Romero, shares different ways of finding story ideas from the outside world.
- Organise your students into groups of 3 or 4 and hand out sheets of paper with ONE of the following written on it: HISTORY, PRESENT DAY, FUTURE. Explain that they will have ONE MINUTE to list as many events as they can think of (or invent) under this heading. (For younger or less experienced writers, create mixed ability groups of no more than 3 so one of them can take the lead in the storytelling.)
 - HISTORY: eg, The Great Fire of London / invention of the telephone / Mark Antony meets Cleopatra.
 - PRESENT DAY: eg, A global pandemic / rise in heating bills / a family holiday flight is cancelled.
 - THE FUTURE: eg. Climate change / last human on earth / secret of eternal youth is found!
- Ask each group to decide on ONE event and spend TWO MINUTES making a list of people who could be affected by it. eg, Rising heating bills could affect: a lonely OAP afraid to put the heating on, a working mum who can't afford to pay them, the rich owner of an energy company.
- Invite your groups to choose ONE of these people and spend TWO MINUTES deciding what they want or need most in the world and ONE thing they do to try and get it. Encourage them to connect these to the topic they've chosen. eg, The working mum wants to win the lottery. She spends all her wages on lottery tickets.
- Next, explain to your groups that they have ONE MINUTE to decide on an unexpected result, based on what this person has done. eg, She wins the lottery but her landlord steals the ticket...
- When they have their unexpected result, ask for a volunteer from each group to spend TWO MINUTES to visit another group and tell them their story so far. Encourage the listening group to

ask as many questions as they can. The storyteller can invent additional details if they wish to answer these questions before returning to their group.

- Invite each group to spend FIVE MINUTES developing the story they've just been told. Encourage them to:
 - Discuss what they like about the story so far. (Less experienced writers can retell the story at this point.)
 - Invent any missing information to take the story further.
 - Change any details that don't fit or could be more interesting.
- Give each group a few more minutes to decide how to present their developed story to the whole group. Encourage them to take turns in the storytelling, to improvise the opening scene or create still images or tableaus of the story so far.
- Invite each group to present their work to the rest of the students and ask the original group (whose story it was originally) to give feedback: *Did it go in an unexpected direction? Are they happy with this development? What would they now develop or change to take this even further?*

FINDING STORY - OUR WRITERS' TIPS:

"Is there a picture you have seen that you found inspiring? Or shocking? Or strange? Can you imagine the story that led to the picture being taken or painted or drawn? Or can you imagine what it would be like to be there?"

"Write two paragraphs about what you did today."

"Jot down overheard conversations."

"Keep a dream journal."

"Ask yourself what makes you angry. What are you excited by? Anxious about? Passionate about? Then ask yourself WHY."

EXTENSION TO ACTIVITY 1 - Research Map.

Writing isn't always about writing! Many writers like to immerse themselves in a subject before even picking up a pen. An important part of the playwright's job is research - whether it be reading archives and history books, or looking at the internet or old photographs. The more you know about a subject, the more passionately (and accurately) you can write about it.

This activity extension allows students to explore how learning and collecting details on an idea that interests them can bring them closer to their subject and widen their storytelling options. Younger writers who have not yet developed research skills might focus their stories around something they are studying or have recently studied in school. *[This activity is best used as a homework task or ongoing accompaniment to Week 1.]*

- Working individually, ask each student to choose ONE event on their group's list (HISTORY, PRESENT DAY, FUTURE) and give them time to gather information on this subject. Encourage them to use newspapers, the internet, the library, etc. but also to consider other ways of gathering information. They could interview people who have more experience in their subject - a relative or neighbour, for example. Invite them to note down their findings in whatever way they wish, eg. *make lists or drawings or even an online collage using an app if they are able to.*
- Ask the students to share the information they have gathered and to think of TWO characters that this event could happen to and that might know each other. Encourage them to ask the following: *What do both these characters want? Are their needs different or connected in some way? What is the 'unexpected result'? Is the same result good for both of them?*
- Invite students to share their research. They could do this privately in a project, or present their research and ideas to encourage feedback from the whole group: *What do they like about this story so far? Who are they most interested in? What do they want to see next?*
- When enough students have shared their stories, discuss the range of ideas with the whole group: *Are there more comedy stories than serious drama or vice versa? Are they big global stories or more personal? Which of these stories could be staged easily in the theatre? Would some of them need a big budget?! Do the same type of characters keep coming up and if so, why might this be?*

Do you have to write about what you know? Not necessarily! Our writers are divided...

"What are you the world authority on? What is your THING? Are you the Scottish authority on wrestling for instance!"

"Or is it your vibe to write on a subject that people DON'T expect of you? My first play was set in WWI. Channelling men at war was not a problem, it's all about personality."

ACTIVITY 2: Personal Storyboards.

This activity is designed to encourage students to explore their own or each other's experiences or memories for story hooks. It uses the idea of 'storyboards,' a popular way of bringing stories to life, most seen in comic books and graphic novels, but often used in film and TV to help a director or designer 'see' a story. (*You will need: pens, large sheets of paper.*)

- Discuss the meaning of a 'storyboard' with your students. *What does a comic book or graphic novel look like? How might this layout be a useful part of planning your story?*
- Organise your students into pairs and distribute paper and pens. Ask the pairs to draw FIVE large squares on the paper.
- Invite one of each pair to draw something they really want in the first box: *world peace, the perfect exam results, a crown...* Add that this drawing can be as simple or detailed as they like. Not every writer or director is great at drawing, it just has to make sense to them!

- Now invite their partner to suggest THREE ways in which they could achieve/get what they want. Explain that the first two ideas must fail and the last will succeed. Encourage these ideas to be as realistic or surprising as they wish.
- Ask your pairs to draw how the first two plans fail in boxes 2 and 3 and to draw the third successful attempt in box 4. If the plans are complicated, they can add dialogue or thought bubbles to explain them.
- Now ask each pair to draw the results of their 'quest' in box 5. Give them a few extra minutes to write down any emotions they feel might accompany this result. Ask them to consider the following: *Have they got or achieved the thing they wanted? Has it been lost / broken / long forgotten in the quest?*
- Invite your pairs to talk through their 'storyboard' with another pair and then discuss the results as a whole group: *which boxes stood out as exciting moments of the story? Which of the stories has a happy / sad / unexpected ending? Were there any comical moments and why were they funny?*

EXTENSION:

- Give your students extra time to create and expand their own storyboards individually, adding extra squares to fill in the gaps. Encourage them to create extra characters and even add lines of dialogue to the squares like a cartoon or graphic novel.
- If they have time, they can colour them or add images from magazines or newspapers, (or even create them on their tablets if they are able to.)



ACTIVITY 3: ADAPTATIONS

Many new ideas come from adaptations of older stories. Take Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*: in real life, King Duncan died in battle and the Macbeths were charitable rulers. Shakespeare turned the Macbeths into dastardly monsters who murdered the innocent king. And added witches! In this activity, students can explore creating their own versions of existing stories. [You will need: pens and paper.]

- Organise your students into groups of 4 or 5 and ask each group to choose a story they know well, that is imaginary or set in the past, eg. from a fairytale, favourite film or book. Younger or less experienced writers can work on the same story as a whole group – one which they have recently studied or one which can be re-read to them.
- Give the groups TWO MINUTES to jot down as much of the story as they can remember, in order of what happens.
- Now ask them to look at the first point in the story and update it to modern times. eg. *Macbeth meets the witches in a supermarket.* / *Cinderella works for the Kardashians!*
- Invite the groups to consider the fallout or results of their updated plot detail. Encourage them to decide what happens now as a result? What further changes must they make? Can they achieve the same ending despite this, or have they invented a new ending? eg, *Macbeth*

has his wife arrested for plotting the murder and the witches take revenge. / The prince marries the Ugly Sister and maybe they're really happy! But the Fairy Godmother is punished for her failure...

- Ask each group to decide what type of story they have created? Is it still a love story or drama? Have they changed it into a horror story or a comedy?
- Explain that they now have TEN MINUTES to 'sell' their new story idea to their audience by performing it as a short play. Suggest that they use a mixture of narration, mime or frozen images / tableaux in their performance but that every member of the group must be used.
- Invite groups to 'sell' their new story and invite feedback from their audience. *Do they recognise the original story? Have any of the stories been improved? Has it created a new leading character? If the type of story has changed, from a comedy to a tragedy for example, which type suits it better?*

Shakespeare's world-building:

Sometimes a theatre can feel more restrictive than the world of film or TV, but Shakespeare managed to set his plays in a wide range of worlds, including:

- A heath in Scotland
- A magical island
- A battlefield
- Venice (despite never having been there!)

In fact it is thought that Shakespeare never left England and yet his plays are set all over the globe. With limited special effects or scenery, he used his language to transport his audience to these places, often telling them directly where they were in a prologue!

B) WORLD

Once your students have their 'hook', their initial idea or beginnings of a story, it is time to build a World for it, in order to make decisions as to where it could be set and other details that might affect their story and add to it.



ACTIVITY 4: WHAT IF?

"You can set the rules. One day can be 40 years long. Why not? Who's to say that you can't have that rule?"

- *Ishy Din, playwright.*

This activity is designed to help students take first steps in building a world that not only suits their story idea but makes that story more interesting or adds more drama, comedy or intrigue. *[You will need: pens and paper. A whiteboard or flipchart.]*

- Watch this film trailer by playwright Ishy Din (<https://37plays.co.uk/resources>) in which he shares his thoughts on where to set a story and what decisions might affect this world. Discuss

his ideas as a group. Which of his questions can they remember? Write them down on the flipchart or whiteboard. Younger writers could work as a whole group and list different settings, times and events which the teacher could write on a flip-chart to support them with the next activity.

- Organise your students into pairs and give one of the pair TWO MINUTES to tell the other the story 'hook' that they have created so far, including any details about character.
- Explain that their partner now has FIVE MINUTES to ask them as many of Ishy's questions as possible (using the flipchart for reference). Explain that every time they answer a question, their partner must ask "What if..." and suggest at least TWO alternatives. Encourage these alternatives to be helpful but challenging. For example:
 - o WHERE is your story set? What part of the world? Inside or outside? WHAT IF it was set in a different country? Or inside a prison?
 - o WHEN is it set? / WHAT IF it was set in the past? Or in the middle of the night? Or over ten years?
 - o WHAT is happening in the world that might affect their story. WHAT IF there was an invasion or a war going on? Or a big sporting event? Or an environmental disaster?
 - o WHAT specific locations will you need? A prison or courtroom? WHAT IF it was set in a school? Or during a family wedding?
- When the time is up, ask them to swap roles so they both have a turn asking 'What if?' Discuss the results as a group. *Has anyone changed their minds about their World? How will these changes help their story? What suggestions did they NOT choose and why? How does it feel to make changes like this? Liberating? Challenging?*

EXTENSION - MOODBOARDS:

Many writers are inspired by their senses. American author, Tracy Chevalier was inspired by a Dutch painting of an unknown girl wearing a pearl earring. Intrigued by the girl and why she wore the earring, she invented a story about her called 'Girl With a Pearl Earring,' a bestselling book which became a feature film starring Scarlett Johansson!

This extension encourages students to look beyond their research to more abstract things that awaken their senses and might enrich their story or suggest a new one altogether!

- Ask your students to create a 'moodboard' for their World. This can be a collection of drawings, words, objects, a collage on paper or on their tablets.
- Invite your students to share their moodboards and talk through them with the group. *How useful is a moodboard like this for a writer? How different is it to the work of a designer in the theatre?*



ACTIVITY 5: WORLD MAPPING

If we've physically been to a place or an event, we remember it through our senses: how it smelt, sounded, what the weather was like, for example. But what if we've never been there? How does Shakespeare convince us that we are in Verona or Padua, or on a magical Island? Like all writers, he uses his imagination and turns that into language, such as these words from *The Tempest* where Caliban describes his island home:

“and then I loved thee
And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile”

The following physical activity is designed to help students fully imagine the World of their play, by exploring the world of the senses and putting that experience into words. If possible, work in a large space cleared of furniture. *[You will need: pens and paper.]*

- Give each student paper and pens and ask them to imagine the very beginning of their story: where and when the very first scene is set. Explain that you are going to ask them a question and they are to write down or draw as many answers as they like to this question on different pieces of paper, eg. *If you ask WHAT CAN YOU HEAR? And their answers are: TRAFFIC, BIRDS, SIRENS, SCREAMING, they write or draw these words/images on 4 different pieces of paper.*
- Continue asking the following questions and encouraging them to write or draw on a few pieces of paper for each:
 - What can you hear? (eg, *Traffic? Birds? Sirens? Screaming?*)
 - What can you smell? (eg, *Freshly baked bread? Smoke? A certain perfume?*)
 - What temperature is it? (eg, *Freezing cold? Humid?*)
 - What can you see close by? (eg, *A fire? A picnic? A crater?*)
 - What can you see far away? (eg, *A hoard of zombies? An endless ocean?*)
- Now give them five minutes to elaborate on these details, adding words or phrases to each piece of paper. *What kind of traffic - stationary or fast moving? What kind of smoke - a BBQ or a factory fire?*
- Organise your students into pairs and invite ONE of the pair to place their pieces of paper like crazy paving stones around their area of the floor. If working in a classroom with furniture, the features of the world could be written on Post-It notes and arranged and shared on a desk-top.
- Explain that they now have FOUR MINUTES to lead their partner (who will have their eyes closed) through a tour of their World. Remind them that they must guide their partner carefully from paper to paper, explaining what they are now 'seeing' or 'smelling' and making sure they don't bump into anything or open their eyes!

- When the tour is finished, ask the visitor to this World to feedback on their experience. *What did they remember most? How did they feel in this World? Could they feel or see anything else that was NOT described?*
- Invite the pair to swap round so the roles are reversed, and repeat the activity and feedback.

EXTENSION - SOUNDSCAPING:

[You will need: pens, paper, access to a tablet with internet access, a recording device with playback facility.]

- Discuss with your students what they understand by a soundscape? *Have they heard one before? How different is a soundscape to a soundtrack? Why might a soundscape be useful to a writer?*
- Ask your students to spend five minutes thinking about the World they have started to create for their story hook and make a list of possible sounds that could be heard in this World. Encourage them to consider the following: *Whether their story is set in the city or countryside. Is it set in the future or the past? What is immediately outside or in the next room?*
- Challenge them to find or create all the sounds or sound effects on this list and record them as a 'soundscape' - a journey of noise and sound that creates an atmosphere for their World, (they could search for sounds on the internet or even use effects or soundtracks from TV, radio, film or games).
- Invite students to play their soundscape to the rest of the group and ask for feedback. *How did this particular World make them feel? What kind of person might live in this World? What type of story might they expect to have this atmosphere - a drama? A comedy?*
- Ask the makers of the soundscape to discuss this feedback. Was it what they expected? Did their audience experience the same World that they imagined? What could they have done differently? How might they help the audience experience their World better as writers? *Writing specific sound effects in the stage directions? Using certain language or images in their character's lines, as Shakespeare does in this example from The Tempest?*

'Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices'

A WRITER'S PROCESS...

Every writer has their own WAY of writing, their 'process'. Roald Dahl wrote in an armchair in his shed. JK Rowling wrote in a cafe with a sleeping baby beside her. Philip Pullman writes in chunks of 4 hours at a time, then stops, even in the middle of a sentence!

What will be your WAY, your 'process'? The answer is - try everything until it works!

OUR WRITERS' TIPS: "Get rid of distractions, delete apps on your phone!"

"What time of the day do you think most clearly? We're all productive at different times"

"Facing the empty page is daunting. Processing things is also valid time."

Week 1. Summary:

At the end of this first week, students should have a number of tools to help them find their story and build a World to set this story in. They will have started making decisions on the following:

- What subject they would like to write about.
- Who their story might be about or who is telling it.
- When and where the story is set.
- What kind of World their story is set in (using imagination, the senses and research.)

At this stage, they may like to continue testing and finding ideas by repeating activities until they settle on a story they would like to continue with. This can be done in their own time so they are prepared for Week 2. Younger or less experienced writers who are struggling to settle on a story could work together as a group with a teacher or TA or in mixed ability pairs to develop a shared story which could be based around something they are studying in school.

If students already have a strong story idea, encourage them to continue with their research in preparation for Week 2, building their story World visually, audibly or whichever way helps them.

However, whether your students have a strong story idea or not, they can still continue with Week 2 and explore the following activities on Character and Dialogue until an idea begins to take shape. Again, this three week resource is about exploring the world of playwriting - very few playwrights complete a play in three weeks! This is merely a starting point and they can take it as far as they wish to go.

WEEK 2.

CHARACTER & DIALOGUE

CHARACTER: OUR WRITERS' TIPS

"All characters are a bit of me in some way. I 'magpie' from different memories and experiences."

"A character starts with a motive, it's about what they want rather than a fully formed back story."

Now your students have decided on their story 'hook' and are developing the World in which their story will take place, it's time for them to create characters to tell their story and explore developing dialogue between these characters.

A) WRITING CHARACTER

Plays can have any number of characters. A one-person show has only one character whereas a big Shakespearean history like *Henry V* or a stage musical such as *Chicago* can have a long cast list. The following activities can help students decide who their story is about and who is going to tell it.



ACTIVITY 6: Keeping Secrets.

A lot of Shakespeare's most interesting characters have secrets they don't tell everyone. These secrets can cause them to behave in interesting ways, making them more complicated as individuals and even making sense of some of their dodgy actions! For example, the Macbeths don't have children - is this why they crave power instead? In Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice and Benedick treat each other badly because they are secretly in love (although everyone knows it, so it's the worst kept secret in the world!) Kryptonite is toxic to Superman, meaning he has something to fear. Everyone has a secret!

This writing activity is designed to encourage students to take the first steps in creating character by exploring this secret inner life. *[You will need: pens and paper.]*

- Ask your students to find a private space in the room and write down 3 things about themselves that people know.
- Now ask them to write down one thing that people DON'T KNOW.

- Without sharing any of these details, discuss as a group how it made them feel to write the secret down. *Was there a change in the room? How would they feel if people knew this secret? How does having a secret change people's behaviour?*
- Now ask your students to get into pairs and come up with a secret for the following characters and how this secret might affect their behaviour in public:
 - A bully in an office
 - A refugee
 - A Hollywood star
- Ask them to choose ONE of these characters and write down 3 things they might do in a day. Encourage them to link these actions to their secret as much as possible without revealing it to anyone.
- Now ask your students to imagine they are this person and spend FIVE MINUTES writing a diary entry about this day.
- Invite volunteers to introduce their character (without telling their secret) and read their diary entry. Can anyone listening guess the secret?
- Now ask the reader to reveal the secret and re-read the diary entry. *Do we hear it differently now we know the truth? How dramatic were the secrets? Did anyone have a positive secret? Were there small secrets that seemed important to the individual?*

EXTENSION:

- In pairs, ask your students to choose one character from a well-known play or film and write down 3 facts (or characteristics) they know about them and to INVENT one secret (good or bad). With younger or less experienced writers, you could model this first with a character and story that they know well.
- Ask the pairs to spend 5 minutes deciding how this secret might change or affect the story they already know. Ask them to write these changes down.
- Invite the pairs to name their character and reveal their secret and what changes they feel it would make to their character's story. Discuss the results as a group: *have their secrets improved the story? What examples do they know where characters have had secrets like this that have affected their behaviour? Does this secret make the character more interesting and if so, how?*

CREATING DIVERSE CHARACTERS. Our writers' tips:

“What is the question you are trying to answer? Once you know this question, who are the most interesting people to explore it? Who are the right mouthpieces? People you expect or people you really wouldn't?”

“What happens to your story if you include a more diverse line-up of characters?”

“Is your character's conflict internal? Or is it an external thing from the world they live in?”



ACTIVITY 7: The Best Mouthpiece.

Sometimes the most interesting storyteller or 'mouthpiece' is not the most OBVIOUS choice. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare puts some of his most beautiful lines in the mouth of Caliban, a 'Devil-born' monster; in *King Lear*, some of the wisest lines are spoken by the Fool. In the film *Toy Story*, the theme of growing up is explored through the voices of the toys themselves.

The following activity is designed to encourage students to make more interesting choices about who they choose to tell their story. *[You will need: pens and paper.]*

- Organise your students into groups of 4 or 5 and invite one person (the playwright) to tell the others (their writing team) their story so far ('hook' and World) and who their story is about (if they know this). Explain that they will have two minutes to do this.
- Now give the writing team two minutes to question the playwright further about their story: *Are there any gaps or missing information? Who or what are they most interested in?* Challenge the playwright to invent this information on the spot if they can!
- Now give the writing team two minutes to decide who ELSE might be in this story, eg. *best friends or enemy / parent or sibling / partner / boss / someone from the future / cell mate?!* Encourage them to choose a good range of possible new characters combine roles to make complex relationships, eg. *Their boss could also be their partner! Or their enemy, their sibling...* For younger and less experienced writers, brainstorm a list of characters as a whole group and write them up on a flip-chart for reference.
- Now ask the writing team group to imagine they are one of these new characters and give them 5 minutes to write down all the reasons why this story should be about THEM: *Why would they be good in this story? Why might an audience be more interested in their voice?*
- Explain that each 'character' now has ONE MINUTE to persuade the playwright to write the play about THEM instead. Invite them to speak in turn and when their minute is up, the playwright can ask them further questions if they wish, for no longer than a minute.
- Invite each team to share their debate with the rest of the group and invite questions: *Has the playwright changed their mind about who their story could be about? Has their team given them more ideas for other characters? Who has successfully made their way into the story?!*

CHARACTER: OUR WRITERS' TIPS

If you are not happy with or losing interest in a character or idea, change it! Remember these are your characters, your rules, they may be inspired by other things, but YOU are the writer.

"It's all in your brain! It's all part of the pot - it's all legitimate."



ACTIVITY 8: Building Character.

The following activity, in two parts, is designed to inspire students to add detail to basic character ideas, creating fully-rounded believable people to inhabit their stories.

A) Hot Seating.

This is a well-used rehearsal room technique to help actors investigate their characters beyond the written words of the play.

- Organise your students into groups of 5 or 6 and invite one volunteer from each to imagine they are the main character in their story (or any character, if they haven't decided.) Younger writers might benefit from raising interesting questions as a whole group. You can then write these up on a flip-chart and model hot-seating first to support them.
- Ask this 'character' to sit in a chair facing the rest of the group and invite the group to ask them questions about their life. Remind them that the more interesting questions will invite more complex answers. *eg, What makes you happy? What would you never do? What would you do if you won ten thousand pounds?*
- Encourage the character in the hot seat to invent their answers on the spot and to avoid just saying yes and no. They are allowed to say 'that's a secret' but only ONCE! Remind them that there are no right or wrong answers, none of their responses are fixed but they must stay in character while they are being questioned.
- After five minutes, ask the volunteers to leave the hot seat and come out of character. Invite the questioners to share any answers they found interesting with them: *Was there anything they want to know more about this character? Was there any information they didn't believe?*
- Swap round until every member of the group has had a turn in the hot seat. Discuss the results as a whole group: *Do the playwrights have a better understanding of their characters? Did their characters lie or say 'that's a secret' and if so, why? What did they feel they didn't know about their character and how will they find this out?*
- To help younger writers stay active and listening, ask everyone in the group to walk around a space in role as their main character. Invite them to stop in pairs, ask and answer a question of each other in role, then move on and repeat up to 6 times then reflect on the final bullet point questions as a whole group.

B) Dating Profiles / Friendship Profiles (for younger writers.)

[You will need: pens, paper and tablets or mobile phones with a facility to record and playback video.]

- Invite each student to choose a character that feels important in their play and to write down FOUR positive facts about this character, *eg., I love seeing stand-up comedy, I make a great*

curry, I'm a family person. And ONE negative fact, eg., *I don't like animals, I used to shoplift, I was the school bully.*

- Ask your students to imagine that they are this character and give them TEN MINUTES to write a short paragraph introducing themselves as a dating/friendship profile for this character. Suggest the following statement to help them start: *My name is..... I have never.....but I would like to.....*
- Encourage them to think about how this person WANTS to be seen and what they are REALLY like and how these things might be different. *What side of their character might they try to hide? What will they emphasise? Is their character comfortable or nervous about joining a dating/friendship site? Will they lie? What kind of person are they trying to attract/befriend?*
- Organise your students into pairs and invite them to record each other's dating/friendship profile to camera. They can read from the page if they wish.
- Invite students to share their dating/friendship app videos and ask for feedback on each character. *What is most appealing about this character? What, if anything, puts them off the most! Was anything funny or dramatic or memorable about this particular character?*
- Ask the playwrights to reveal the negative fact about their characters that they did NOT reveal on the dating/friendship app video. *Why did they hide these details? Is it something they might reveal in their story?*

B) WRITING SPEECH & DIALOGUE

WRITING DIALOGUE - SOME TIPS FROM OUR WRITERS:

"It's alright for the 1st draft to be rubbish. Dialogue is the clay to be moulded into what you want to do. The 1st draft is for you, the 7th is for the audience."

"Be mischievous in your choices. Get characters to describe themselves and then pick out their lies!"

"Don't be afraid of looking at film and TV, a very powerful scene may not have much language at all."

Once your students have created at least two characters for their story, it is time to explore how these characters might talk and interact in that world.



ACTIVITY 9: Capturing a 'Voice'.

The following writing activities are designed to help students identify the unique voice of a character, to experiment with replicating that voice for themselves and see what that voice looks like on the

page. [You will need: pens, paper and tablets or mobile phones with internet access and a voice record app.]

a) Telly Talk.

[This activity requires a clip of ONE character talking in a TV programme or film (such as a soap or drama). You could let your students find this for themselves if you have time or choose a suitable clip yourself to play to the whole group. The character doesn't have to be making a speech, but they should be doing most of the talking for at least one minute.]

- Play your students the chosen TV or film clip of one character speaking (or let them find and watch their own).
- Ask them to write a short speech for this character in their 'voice'. You can play the recording a couple more times to let them really hear the choice of words and vocal habits this person has, eg., *Do they pause or say 'er...' a lot? Do they stress certain words? Do they speak in short or long sentences?*
- Play the clip again and allow a few more minutes for them to tweak their own writing.
- Invite volunteers to read their speeches to the group and discuss the results: *What did they find easy or difficult about this challenge? Do they think it would be different if it was a character they had invented themselves?*

b) Raw Speech.

- Organise your students into pairs with pens, paper and a recording device.
- Ask them to take turns asking each other the following questions whilst recording the answers on the device:
 - What was your morning routine?
 - Describe your journey here today?
 - What are your plans for the weekend?
- Give the pairs five minutes to play back the recordings and write down EXACTLY what was said. Remind them to include any pauses, 'erms', mistakes, nervous laughter, etc. and to put these answers together as a continuous speech, leaving out the questions.
- When both 'speeches' have been written down, invite your pairs to read each other's speech to each other.
- Ask your pairs to discuss the results: *Did what they'd written sound like real speech? What cuts or changes could they make to improve this speech in any way? Could they add some words or phrases to develop it into something an audience might be interested in?*

- Give your pairs five minutes to make these changes and to decide where they might set this speech: *Is it someone talking to a friend on the bus? Is it a witness in court? An elderly person reminiscing? How will this affect the changes they make?*
- Ask your pairs to spend a few minutes rehearsing their speeches as if they were in these settings and invite them to show the rest of the group. For younger writers, or if time is limited, you can choose several contrasting speeches to show to the rest of the group.
- Discuss the results as a group: *How different were these scenes, considering they were produced from the same 3 questions?*

EXTENSION - Speaking in Rhythm.

Most speech has some sort of rhythm, especially if a character has a strong accent. Rhythm can be catchy and it is easy to fall into the rhythm of another person. Sometimes writers deliberately make their characters speak in verse or rhyme to affect their audience in some way. Shakespeare uses the rhythm of the heartbeat under a lot of his writing - particularly when characters are making a formal speech or feeling strong emotions.

For an example of this, watch [this 5 minute link](#) from our Shakespeare Learning Zone on this heartbeat rhythm: 'iambic pentameter'.

The following extension exercise explores the 'heartbeat' rhythm in Shakespeare's verse and challenges the students to explore each other's speech in a heightened way. [You will need: pens, paper, copies of Juliet's speech below, copies of their speeches from the previous exercise 'Raw Speech'.]

- Organise your students into a big circle and ask them to tap out a heartbeat rhythm together on their chests or on the floor. Discuss how this beat sounds and where the strong or stressed beat comes. *How useful might the stressed beats be to a writer? To an audience?*
- Hand out Juliet's speech below in verse and discuss what it looks like on the page. *Is there anything unusual about it? Does it look like speech? A poem?*
- Invite the students to read the speech out loud, all together as a group to that heartbeat rhythm. Allow younger writers time to write the separate syllables split with dashes and then ask them to highlight the stressed beat: eg. *come-**night**-come-ro-me-o-come-**thou**-day-in-night.*

JULIET

Come, night; come, Romeo; come, thou day in night;
 For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
 Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.
 Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow'd night,
 Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,
 Take him and cut him out in little stars,
 And he will make the face of heaven so fine
 That all the world will be in love with night
 And pay no worship to the garish sun.

- Discuss the effects of this rhythm on Juliet's words. *How many heartbeats are in each line of verse? What words are landing on the stressed beat and what does this do to their meaning? Are there any repetitions? Rhymes? How might this affect an audience?*
- Now ask your students to take the 'Raw Speech' they wrote earlier and give them 15 minutes to work on it and see if they can make it fit a five-heartbeat rhythm. Encourage them to change, cut or add any words they like to make it fit. Give younger or less experienced writers a model line on a flip chart at the front: de DUM de DUM de DUM de DUM de DUM and support them with some shared writing to make a line of 'raw speech' into iambic pentameter before letting them work independently.
- Challenge them to include a rhyming couplet. For example, this from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

'Did my heart love till now? Foreswear it, sight!

For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.'

- Ask your students to give their finished speech to their original partner (who said the original words in the 'Raw Speech' activity!) and ask them to deliver the new version to the rest of the group.
- Discuss the results: *Which version worked best and why? Were the results funny or more powerful? How difficult or easy was it to write this way? What types of words did you need to add to make it fit, (adjectives, verbs)? What did this do to the meaning?*

WRITING DIALOGUE - more of our writer's tips...

"Write a play with no dialogue. Adapt a myth. Write a protest chant for something you care about."

"For new writers, there's no other way than to start copying - find something you enjoy and own it, the psychological side of it at least."

"Read plays and copy! Just read plays!"



ACTIVITY 10: Internal Dialogue.

Story is driven by character: what they do and how they think, so it follows that the best stories have the most complex characters with complex problems and arguments! Shakespeare lets his characters speak their internal arguments directly to the audience in soliloquies: such as Iago plotting to bring down Othello or Hamlet literally deciding whether it is better to live or die in his famous "To be or not to be" speech.

This activity is designed to help students work collaboratively and create two distant voices from the internal argument of one of Shakespeare's most troubled characters. For younger students familiar with *Macbeth*, follow the shorter primary edit. For students unfamiliar with *Macbeth*, there is an adapted activity below. *[You will need: pens and paper, copies of Macbeth's speech below.]*

MACBETH

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.

Primary edit:

MACBETH

He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued,
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind.

- Organise your students into pairs and hand out copies of Macbeth's speech. Explain that Macbeth is in his castle, speaking to the audience about whether or not he should kill King Duncan, who is currently his guest.
- Give the pairs two minutes to make a list all the reasons why Macbeth MIGHT kill the king, eg. *power, money, to please his wife, etc.*

- Now ask the pairs to read through the speech, line by line in turn, stopping when they identify a reason NOT to kill Duncan and to mark these on the page.
- Explain that one person is to imagine they are Macbeth and must write down a reason why he COULD kill the king from their list. Their partner must write the other side of the argument, using the reasons spotted in the speech. Give them fifteen minutes to do this or until they have written a complete scene with two characters having this argument.
- Invite pairs to read this scene to the rest of the group and invite positive feedback: *Who do the audience think this other character might be? His friend? His ambition?*

ADAPTATION (for students unfamiliar with *Macbeth*):

- Ask your students to think of a fairy story which they know well or which could be re-read to them: eg. *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.
- Organise your students into pairs and encourage one writer to imagine they are Goldilocks and list why they SHOULD break into the house, steal the porridge and sleep in the bed.
- Invite the other writer to come up with the reasons AGAINST them doing this. Give your pairs three minutes to complete their list.
- Ask your pairs to organise their lists into an argument with one writer giving their reason for and the other giving their reason against, in turn, until they have a scene of dialogue between them.
- Invite your pairs to read their scenes to the whole group and invite positive feedback: *How do we feel about these characters? Whose side are we on and why?*



ACTIVITY 11: Yes / No.

One of Shakespeare's strengths is his ability to create dramatic scenes where characters have polar opposite wants and needs, eg. *Juliet is in love with Romeo BUT her father wants her to marry Paris*.

This activity is also designed to help students work collaboratively, using a physical rehearsal room technique as a springboard for writing vibrant dialogue with contrasting objectives. There is an adapted activity below for younger writers. *[You will need: pens and paper.]*

- Organise your students into pairs where one is A, the other B. Explain that A only has the word 'yes', B can only say 'no' but they both have to get their partner to come with them to the other side of the room.
- Encourage them to use as many tactics as they can think of, eg. *body language, tone of voice* - but they cannot touch!
- After a few minutes, ask them to repeat the exercise using just gestures. Then ask them to repeat standing still and only using different tones of voice. Discuss the results as a group: *Which tactics worked best and why?*

- Ask your pairs to choose FOUR of these tactics each (they can steal from other pairs!) and write a two-person scene where the characters have very different objectives, eg. *A wants to go out, B wants to stay in. / A wants to start a pension plan, B wants to rob a bank.*
- Encourage them to use their four chosen tactics within the scene to try and achieve their objectives.
- Invite your pairs to perform their scene and ask them to keep the scene going through improvisation if they wish, using as many other tactics as they like. If they run out of tactics, invite the audience to shout some out!

ADAPTATION (for younger writers):

- As a whole group, brainstorm some opposing objectives which they might be familiar with and list them on a flip-chart: eg. *A child wants extra playtime, the teacher wants extra maths time.*
- Invite your group to improvise an argument with you, suggesting all the reasons why they SHOULD have extra play time. You can respond with your counter reasons and list both sets of reasons on a flip-chart.
- Organise your group into pairs and ask them to write a short discussion or argument between a teacher and a child, using the shared list as a support.
- Invite pairs to read out their scene to the rest of the group and discuss the results: *Who won the argument in each case? What was it about the writing that made their case stronger?*

A WRITER'S PROCESS...

It's so easy to get distracted, especially in our world today with mobile devices, social media and instant news! How do we keep focus when working on an idea? Do we schedule writing time into our lives or stop everything when an idea hits? Some tips from our writers...

"Keep a notebook by the bed. Take one with you everywhere even when you go swimming!"

"Write solidly for 20 minutes, then take 10 minutes off."

"Force yourself to write for an hour, write anything. Call it the WRITING HOUR."

The answer is: try everything. If it works for you, do it!

Week 2. Summary:

At the end of this second week, students should have an idea of the main characters in their story and started experimenting with writing speeches and dialogue. In particular, they will have explored the following:

- The diversity of their story (who is the best person to tell it.)
- Creating fully-rounded characters with an inner life.
- Capturing characters' voices through improvisation.
- The effects of rhythm and 'heightened' speech.
- Creating dialogue out of their characters' wants and needs.

These activities may hopefully have developed their stories further or taken them in a different direction and it is important at this stage that they feel free to do this - there is no right or wrong here. In preparation for Week 3, they can continue experimenting with the following in their own time:

- Repeating activities 6, 7 & 9 with different characters and character combinations.
- Writing character biographies or diary entries.
- Writing out their story so far in different ways: as a 200 word news bulletin, as a twitter thread, in one 25 words or less sentence!

WEEK 3.

PLOT & STRUCTURE

At this point, your students have created characters that might already have started to develop their story. The following activities are designed to help them shape and structure their story into a plot and write their very first scene.

So, what is the difference between plot and structure? Plot = WHAT happens. Structure = HOW it happens. Any writer can mess with the structure of their plot to make the story more exciting to an audience. For instance, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare wrote about two young people from warring families falling in love. HOWEVER, he tells us the ending in the first speech of the play - SPOILER! In the film *Titanic*, we know the ship sinks, but we still want to see how it happens...

A) THE PLOT



ACTIVITY 12: Movie Trailers.

This physical activity is designed to inspire students to decide, just like Shakespeare and James Cameron, what kind of journey they want to take their audience on. [You will need: pens and paper.]

- Organise your students into groups of 3 or 4 and ask them to choose one story they all know well (this can be a fairy tale or a film or book.) Younger writers could all work on the same familiar story or work in mixed ability groups for support.
- Ask them to decide on a completely different way of telling their story, eg., *Presenting Cinderella as a horror movie or a comedy. What if Hamlet was a musical?*
- As a group, discuss what they understand by a 'movie trailer.' Have they seen one? Can they remember any? If any less experienced writers are unfamiliar with movie trailers, allow them to watch a couple in preparation.
- Explain that they will have 15 minutes to devise a movie trailer for their new story, involving every member of the group. Encourage them to include: narration, lines for characters to say, moments from the story - acted out or presented in frozen images or tableaux.
- Invite each group to perform their movie trailer. Discuss the results: did any group improve their story? What is it like when the mood of a story changes? eg. *When a serious moment happens in a comedy or something funny happens in a horror film?* Can they think of any examples of this? eg. *When the toys in Toy Story face the fiery furnace. / The comedy porter scene in Macbeth, right after the murder!*



ACTIVITY 13: Rollercoaster.

"Playwriting is like designing a fairground ride." - Sarah Waters, writer.

There is a reason why the queues at Alton Towers are miles long, we love an exciting journey and the more thrills and spills involved, the more popular a story can become. When was the last time a film surprised you with a twist at the end? Or a sudden scare? Which book contained the death of a character that you really liked?

This creative activity is designed to encourage students to develop their story structure to create a more exciting emotional experience for their audience. [You will need: pens and large pieces of paper.]

- Discuss as a whole group, the features of a fairground rollercoaster, eg., the slow ascent, the sudden drops, the corkscrews, the tilting drastically and turning upside down! *What effects do the different features have on the people riding the rollercoaster? Do they know the names of any famous rollercoasters? What do these names suggest about the ride itself?*

- Allow younger or less experienced writers to watch a clip of a rollercoaster first to ensure they all have this experience, then choose a story they are familiar with and model with the whole group how it might map out as a rollercoaster ride.
- Organise your students into groups of 3, distribute paper & pens and give each member of the group ONE MINUTE to tell each other their story 'hooks' so far. To keep levels of engagement high with younger writers, organise students into mixed ability pairs, allowing each one of the pair time to develop their own plot map / rollercoaster.
- Ask your groups to choose ONE of these stories and explain that they will have 15 minutes to adapt this story into a new rollercoaster ride.
- Explain that they can design the journey of the rollercoaster on the paper (extending to other pieces of paper if they need to), that the rollercoaster journey must include all the main events of the plot so far and be as exciting a ride as possible for the people on it.
- Encourage them to match the different features of the ride that they just discussed with the twists and turns and dramatic moments in the plot and to write down the emotions and reactions they want their audience to feel next to these features.
- If they have any gaps in the ride, encourage them to keep those blank and draw the end of the ride so they know what the destination will be like. Then invite them to go back to these gaps and see what is missing from their journey: *Could they add a corkscrew moment where the protagonist is lost and needs to make a decision, or their life is spinning out of control? A last-minute sudden drop as a plot twist?*
- Invite groups to talk through the 'rides', even if they are not finished, explaining what is happening in the plot as they take the audience through the journey. Encourage the audience to fill in any gaps that are still present with ideas: *What might be missing at the beginning? Middle? End?! Could we add another problem like a surprise ending that takes us in a different direction?*
- Discuss the results: *Which features worked best with the plot points? What kind of ride do they feel they have just been on? Did these audience feelings and reactions match the ones written down?*

B) STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE - our writers' tips...

"Know what you intend to do at each point. Go through each scene in your play and sum it up in one line: the scene in which..."

"Create a timeline of your play." "Go against existing forms." "Use images, diagrams, post-it notes."

"Tradition can be your friend. Following a 5 Act or 3 Act structure can be handy if you're struggling. You don't need to follow it rigidly."



ACTIVITY 14: Post-It Plots.

This follows on from the previous activity and is designed to encourage students to work collaboratively to build a working plot from their story hook. There is an adaptation of this activity for younger or less experienced writers below. *[You will need: pens, post it notes or paper.]*

- Ask your students to form groups of 3 or 4 and choose a story that they know well: eg. A fairytale or Shakespeare plot.
- Hand each group a pile of Post-It notes or paper and invite them to write down at least 10 things that happen in the original story they chose, one on each note.
- Ask them to choose ONE of these events and change it entirely, eg., *Cinderella does NOT go to the ball. / Juliet falls in love with Paris, not Romeo.*
- Give the group ten minutes to examine the rest of the story Post-Its that follow on from this moment. Which need changing? Invite them to rewrite any that do. Can they still achieve the story's ending? Or can they make a new ending happen using the same number of notes?
- Invite each group to imagine they are walking into a room full of Hollywood or West End producers to sell this new story idea as a play or film. Give the group five minutes to decide how to do this.
- Invite the group to 'pitch' the story to the rest of the group. Take a vote on whether the producers would invest their money on this new show or film!

ADAPTATION for younger or less experienced writers. *[You will need: pens, large pieces of paper, Post-It notes.]*

- Choose one story that your students know well, one they have recently studied or one which can be re-read to them.
- Ask them to suggest at least 10 things that happen in this story, write these down on large pieces of paper and stick them up on the wall in order of when they happen. Explain to your students that this is the 'plot' of the story, a list of events that happen.
- Now organise your students into mixed ability pairs with Post-It notes and ask them to think of 10 things that happen in their own story that they are developing themselves. At this stage, they might not know 10 things but encourage them to make these up and use their partner to help them complete the list.
- Invite the pairs to lay out their Post-It notes to create a complete plot and to talk each other through their story. Encourage them to help each other improve their plots by filling in any gaps or replacing any Post-It notes with more dramatic or exciting options.
- Stick your Post-It Plots up on the wall around the room and invite the students to explore each other's stories!



ACTIVITY 15: Stepping Stones

This activity is designed to encourage students to explore the size and shape of their story idea by exploring well known play formats and experimenting with structure. There is an adaptation for younger or less experienced writers below. *[You will need: pens and pieces of paper: A4 and A3 if possible.]*

- Organise your students into pairs and ask them to choose one of their story 'hooks' to work with.
- Give the groups ONE MINUTE to write down their story in three lines on three pieces of paper labelled: BEGINNING, MIDDLE, END and lay them on the floor in order.
- Now ask them to add two pieces of paper at the end of the chain, labelled: UPSET and NEW ENDING, and give them five minutes to add to their story in order to complete these.
- Ask them to number these five pieces of paper and spread them out like stepping stones across the floor, so there are gaps between each one.
- Ask them to place a blank piece of paper between each 'stone' and give the pairs five minutes to write down as many ideas as they can think of to get from stone one to two.
- Explain that each of these ideas is a possible 'scene' for their play. Invite them to choose one of these scenes and write down which characters are in it and where it could be set. Repeat this until they have chosen connecting scenes for all of their stepping stones.
- Using a different colour, ask them to draw the journey of their main character from the first stone to the ending, writing in possible lines, feelings or experiences along the way.
- Invite the groups to talk through this character's journey with the rest of the group. Invite positive criticism from the audience: *Which scenes did they like the sound of most? Does the ending sound satisfying?*

ADAPTATION (for younger or less experienced writers): *[You will need: pens, large pieces of paper, Post-It notes.]*

- Choose one story that your students know well, that they have recently studied or that can be re-read to them. As a group, decide on 3 main plot points that make up the beginning, middle and end of the story: eg. Cinderella:
 - BEGINNING: Cinderella wants to go to the ball and the Fairy Godmother helps her.
 - MIDDLE: She and the prince fall in love but she has to leave in a rush.
 - END: The prince finds Cinderella and they marry.
- Now invite them to suggest 2 more plot points to add onto the story to add a surprise ending: eg.

- Cinderella hates being Queen.
 - She and the King run away together and open a little shop.
- Now organise your students into mixed ability pairs and ask them to do these same two steps for one of their own story ideas, starting with 3 plot points and adding two others - the surprise ending.
 - Invite them to write these plot points on 5 different pieces of paper and lay them out on the floor in order as 'stepping stones'.
 - Ask them to place a blank piece of paper between each 'stone' and give the pairs five minutes to think of as many ideas as possible to get from stone one to two: eg. *If Stone One is 'boy finds a stray dog' and Stone Two is 'stray dog runs away.'* What happens in-between? Does the boy do something to make the dog run away? Does the dog's owner come back?
 - Explain that each of these ideas is a possible 'scene' for their play and to choose one of them. Invite them to write down where the scene is set on a Post-It and stick it on the stepping stone.
 - Now ask them to write a list of characters that are in this scene on a Post-It and stick it on the stepping stone.
 - Encourage them to think about how their main character FEELS and what they DO or SAY in this scene and stick those on Post-Its also.
 - Ask each pair to repeat this exercise until they have scenes with Post-Its linking all their stones.
 - If you have time, repeat the exercise with another story idea until each of the pair have a stepping stone plot for their story.
 - Invite the pair to walk each other through their plot, from stone to stone, talking through each scene of the story, where it is set, the characters in it and what their main character does from scene to scene.
 - If you have time, invite a couple of volunteers to talk the whole group through their stepping stone plot!



ACTIVITY 16: Adding Stage Directions

MORE WRITER'S TIPS (on dialogue):

"The more acute the experience, the less articulate its expression."

- Harold Pinter, playwright (1947–2008)

- Discuss the purpose of stage directions in a script. *How do they help the actors? The audience? Why might a writer use stage directions? They might a stage direction be more powerful than a spoken line?*

- Invite your students to form their A&B pairs again and ask A to make a list of 10 actions to say 'I love you' whilst B makes a list of 10 actions to say 'I hate you'.
- Organise the As into one line, facing their B partners and invite them to have an unspoken conversation using only these actions.
- Ask your pairs to return to the scene they wrote in the 'Yes/No' activity and add at least two of their lines with a stage direction. Explain that this stage direction might add to a line's meaning or replace a line entirely.
- Invite your pairs to perform their scene with these new stage directions. Discuss the results: *Did the stage direction make the scene clearer? More powerful, funny or interesting?*



ACTIVITY 17: First Scene

- Ask your pairs to choose ONE scene from either of their stepping stone plots (Activity 15) to write. Encourage them to think about what happens just before this scene and where it needs to end up. What needs to happen in this scene for the next scene to work? Ask younger, less experienced writers to write individually at this point to keep them all engaged and active and to move their plays along.
- Give them a larger piece of paper to plan this scene. Give them ten minutes to write down or draw every character who needs to appear in this scene and to make a list of the following decisions:
 - Where it might be set?
 - What does the stage look like at this moment?
 - Will there be any set changes?
 - Any entrances or exits?
- Ask your groups to think about the characters in the scene. *What are they physically doing? What do they all want or need in order to get to the next scene? What do they need to do or say to make this happen? Who will speak first?*
- As a whole group, make a list of scenes and the numbers of characters in them and organise your students into groups that match these character numbers. Try to keep the original writers in their groups as they will know the most about their scene. You may have to repeat this stage a few times to get through every scene.
- Give the groups ten minutes to improvise the dialogue in this scene between them. Encourage them to think about the activities they have done already: *Will there be stage directions? Will any character speak directly to the audience? How differently might they speak? Do any of them have an accent or use longer sentences? What tactics will they use to get what they want?*



ACTIVITY 18: First Reading

Now your students are forming their first scene. At this stage, writers can feel many things, they may be feeling inspired to take it further or it can feel like there's a lot more work to be done - after all, this is only one scene. And how do I know if it's any good?! This is the perfect time to hear your work out loud and see it staged in front of you.

In this extension, students can explore how to lay their scene out on the page in a way that actors can understand and get those actors, their peers, to bring the first draft of this scene to life! *[You will need: pens, paper, copies of 2 plays - modern & Shakespeare, access to computers for students to write on if required.]*

- Discuss with the group what they understand by 'a first draft.' Explain that all writers complete many drafts to get a play ready for the stage. Sometimes you know yourself what needs to be improved from draft to draft, but sometimes you need to hear your work in the mouths of others, to know what is and isn't working yet.
- Show your students the opening scene of two plays: a modern play and a Shakespeare play. Discuss what they see on the page, eg., The way the lines are laid out. / Stage directions. / How the scene starts and ends. / How characters enter and exit. *Are there any similarities between what was written now and what was printed 400 years ago? If so, why might this be?* Younger writers could look at a scene from a play they have already studied to support their understanding of how layout supports actors.
- Read both scenes out loud within the group (by splitting into smaller groups depending on cast size, or reading both as a whole group). Discuss how the layout of the scene helped the actors in their reading. *What else is there on the page to help other people from the creative team, eg. The director? The designer? Technical team?*
- Ask each student to write down the scene they are working on (from the Stepping Stone Activity 15) using either format as a guide (either the modern play or the Shakespeare play.) Encourage them to use whatever method they feel comfortable with, either on a computer or on paper. Many modern writers still use pen and paper first!
- If any students complete a first draft of their scene within the lesson time, invite them to cast their scene within the group (including someone to read stage directions) and give the cast a few minutes with their writer to look through the scene and familiarise themselves with it.
- Invite the cast to read the scene out loud to the rest of the group. Discuss the experience with the writer: *How did it feel to work with a cast for the first time on this scene? What was it like to hear the words out loud? Do they know what they will do next to this scene? Will they be making any changes following the reading?*

EXTENSION - USING ACTORS AS PART OF THE WRITING PROCESS.

This is a longer activity (due to student/scene numbers and the complexity of the casting, etc.) so it might be best given to students to develop the readings in their own time if they are able to, coming together for the readings and feedback. For younger writers, you could choose and photocopy a

selection of scenes for the group to explore and organise the group into sizes which match the characters in each – this activity could be repeated in subsequent lessons with different scenes if time allowed.

- Give your students extra time to finish the first draft of their scene until they all have something to cast and read.
- Divide your students into small groups with enough members to read at least ONE of the scenes and give them 10 minutes to read through these scenes and discuss how they might be staged with their writer. Encourage them to get the scene 'on its feet', with entrances and exits and to find and use any props or seating they need.
- Invite the groups to perform their scenes and ask for positive feedback from their audience: *Whose story do they think it is? What kind of World are they in? What did they want to see next?*
- Discuss the results with the playwrights. *How does it feel handing your work over this early? How different was it seeing the scene on its feet, rather than just being read? What will they do next to develop their story, their characters and dialogue?*



ACTIVITY 19: Spot the Difference.

This activity allows students to compare two extracts from plays by two of our playwrights who have used very different structures and explore the reasons behind this chosen structure. [You will need: pens, paper, copies of scene extracts - A. *The Return* by Chris O'Connell and B. *Big Guns* by Nina Segal.

*link to both scenes

Extract A (from *The Return* by Chris O'Connell)

Neil steps out of the audience.

Neil: **To Caroline** Can I help?

Caroline: Neil?

Neil: Alright?

Caroline: Great to see you.

Neil: You too.

Caroline: I heard Jas mention your name -

Neil: What brings you here?

Caroline: What brings you here!

Neil: All part of the job description, word on the street and all that.

Caroline: Down with the kids.

Neil: Can but try.

Caroline: Brilliant to see you.

Neil: How's things?

Caroline: Good. You?

Neil: Can't complain.

Caroline: How long were you - ?

Neil: I was on my way to a meeting -

They wait.

Neil: Great to see you.

Caroline: Yeah, you too.

Neil: Yes.

Caroline: Or not, I don't know, I mean -

Neil: Yes. Of course / it is -

Caroline: You're right.

Neil: - it's - You haven't changed -

Caroline: Don't be daft.

Neil: I'm serious.

Caroline: You have -

Neil: Still got all my own teeth.

Impulsively, they hug.

Neil: Not sure we should be doing that!

Caroline: Double jabbed aren't you?

Neil: Yep.

Caroline: Outside aren't we?

Neil: Last time I looked.

Caroline: Give me another one then.

They hug again, laughing, less guarded.

Neil: How long've you been back? I'm presuming you're - or are you just visiting, or -

Caroline: A year or so. Just before Covid.

Neil: So you've been away all this time until what – last Feb?

Caroline: Late Jan.

Neil: Right. I mean I presumed you must've been because I've never –

Caroline: Well, there's been the odd trip back here and there - But generally, abroad, yes.

Neil: Right. A year? How've we not seen each other?

Caroline: There's quite a few thousand of us living here Neil.

They wait

Caroline: But yes, the wanderer returns.

They wait

Extract B (from *Big Guns* by Nina Segal)

A second black sack.

This sack,
if there is a sack,
is heavier than the first and has to be dragged,
slowly and
with great purpose.

If we were on a beach,
a tropical beach,
a tropical island paradise,

(not in a theatre)

then the dragged bag would leave
a great smiling trench in the pure white sand.

ONE: Two people. Ike and Kay.

TWO: Kay and Ike.

ONE: They never quite settled on a preferred order in which to
say their Christian names.

TWO: Ike is tall with broad shoulders and
a long, surprisingly thin neck that sways above his body.
Like an eel,
he thinks,
on a bad day.

ONE: On a good day,
rare good day,
he focuses on his shoulders and doesn't notice the neck
quite so much.

TWO: You know this because Ike keeps a blog.

ONE: They both do.

BOTH: Together.

TWO: 'Ike and Kay's Corner', they call it.

Home decor and
the occasional gratuitously misinformed political rant.

ONE: It's charming, really.

TWO: All block caps and
dead links and
images ripped directly from Gwyneth Paltrow's goop.com.

ONE: A solid effort.

TWO: A happy home.

ONE: Not the place to wonder

out loud and
in public then,
whether your neck looks like a serpent hanging from a four-day-old birthday balloon.

TWO: Not on the blog, God no,

save that for the forums,
the message boards,

the dark-desk-drawer-of-the-Internet.

ONE: You know this because you

Googled Ike's email address, after finding it on the
Ike and Kay's Corner 'Contact Ike and Kay' page.

TWO: You were curious.

ONE: A healthy curiosity.

TWO: 572 posts archived since 2009.

ONE: You read them all.

What can you say?

You're interested in people. You're a people-person.

TWO: You read them all, in one long,

sleepless,

selfless night.

And you know this:

ONE: Ike hates his neck.

TWO: Ike hates his boss.

- Divide your students into groups of three or four and distribute copies of both scenes. Explain that they have FIVE MINUTES to spot as many VISUAL differences between the two scenes as possible. Encourage them to look at style and structure rather than the subject matter. eg: *How the characters' lines are laid out on the page. What information we are given about the characters, who is talking and who they are talking to. Any stage directions or directions for actors to follow.*
- Invite the students to cast the scene within their groups and read both scenes out loud. Ask them to add to their lists if they find any more differences after this.
- Now ask them to look through their list and think of at least ONE reason why each writer has chosen to do what they've done. Invite them to write these reason down next to the difference. eg: *Writer A has included character names, Writer B hasn't. Writer A wants the actors and director to know who is speaking. Writer B has left the casting open to the actors and director.*
- Discuss these reasons together as a group and try to expand on them: *Why might Writer A need us to know who is speaking? Have they given certain lines deliberately to a specific character and why? Why does Writer B want to keep the casting so open? Is this to break down our assumptions of gender within relationships? Why might this decision be useful or effective?*
- Ask your students which differences in structure they prefer and why? Can they think of any other plays that have a different type of structure?

EXTENSION:

- Give your students some extra time to research differently structured plays and to bring in examples of these. Encourage them to visit a library for this or study some writers' complete works. If possible, they can make photocopies or take pictures of the pages of text.
- Remind them to include writers from different periods in time: *How did the Greeks write their plays? What examples of structure can we find in Shakespeare's work? Soliloquies and use of Prologues and Chorus for example.*
- If you have time, gather some of these examples and read or stage them together as a group and discuss the results: *Why has the writer chosen this structure? Which choices do you prefer and why? Which give the actors or director more restrictions or more freedom?*

A WRITER'S PROCESS...

So you've started writing. Now what? Some tips from our writers on keeping going...

"Set achievable goals for the day."

"Only plug specific holes with research. It's easy to get lost in research, it can be never-ending." "Don't get lost down the rabbit hole!"

"There is a point where a play needs to be heard out loud."

This is YOUR process. If one method doesn't work for you, try something else. Just keep going!

Week 3. Summary:

At the end of this third week, students will have developed their 'Hook' into a full story, learned the difference between plot and structure and started to explore the following:

- The beginning, middle and the end of their story.
- The kind of journey they want to take their audience on.
- What a scene in their play might look like.
- The use of stage directions.
- What their work sounds like when read out loud.

This is an exciting time when they can revisit any of the activities over the three weeks to develop their story, World or characters, expand their research and experiment with different ways of writing speech and dialogue. Maybe they would like to write more scenes or play around with the structure of their story - to develop their play, their way!

MOVING FORWARD...

There will be a partner resource to this Pack later in the year which will look at more in-depth aspects of playwriting, in particular:

- Writing scenes and shaping your play.
- Feedback - recognising helpful criticism and what to do with it.
- Re-drafting - learning to rewrite and edit.
- Getting plays on their feet - hearing them read out loud.

This Pack is aimed at inspiring any students who are interested in completing their own play but will also be a useful resource for anyone who wants to further understand the work of a playwright and explore different ways of expressing their thoughts and ideas.

"Making mistakes, writing things and then starting again, trying things out, rewriting are all part of the process. You're not wasting time - it all has value. You can let yourself think, research, ask questions, dream before you write anything down. Or you can get started right away and let yourself try things. It's all part of writing a play."

- Juliet Gilkes Romero, playwright.

FURTHER INSPIRATION...

Below are the names of the playwrights we worked with to create these ideas. Look them up and read their plays. The more stories you absorb, the more it feeds your imagination! At some point, all of these writers (including Shakespeare) had never written a play and didn't know how to begin.

Amy	Ng
Bea	Roberts
Brad	Birch
Chris	O'Connell
Isabel	Dixon
Ishy	Din
Isley	Lynn
Juliet	Gilkes Romero
Nina	Segal
Phil	Porter
Rob	Drummond
Sami	Ibrahim
Jack	Holden
Stephanie	Dale