

2009 Delaware Young Playwrights Festival First Round Classroom Visit

Lesson Plan developed by David Stradley

Overall Lesson Objectives: 1) Students will examine playwriting as a meaningful and personal form of creative expression. 2) Students will explore the fundamentals of playwriting, as well as compare and contrast elements of playwriting and screenwriting. 3) Students will review the DYPF theme.

I. Warm Up (10 minutes)

(Objective 1)

A. Exercise: Pet Peeve—School Style

1. Three students are asked to “rant” on a specific aspect of their school that annoys them (excluding specific teachers or students).

B. Discussion

1. Afterwards, students discuss whether the rants would have been as interesting if they were about events at a different school.

2. Students brainstorm stories about people their age by people their age.

3. Final thought: DYPF is all about your stories – the things you want the world to know about. This is your chance to be heard.

Assessment: 1) Students will formulate the principle that stories are more engaging when one can see one’s own experience reflected on stage. 2) During discussion, students will brainstorm at least three reasons why their stories have value.

II. Play vs. Movie (5 minutes)

(Objectives 1 and 2)

A. Discussion: A Play Is Not A Movie

1. Students brainstorm things you can do in a movie that are harder to do on stage.

2. Students brainstorm things that theatre can do better than a movie.

3. Final thought: Turn what you think might be limitations of writing for stage into strengths.

Assessment: 1) Students will recall and restate the unique features of writing for the stage. 2) Students will analyze samples of screenplays and point out features problematic for a staged play.

III. DYPF Theme (Approximately 15-20 minutes)

(Objectives 1 and 3)

A. State theme of DYPF: Write a play in which a character or characters come to realize their full potential despite the limitations of their surroundings. (Explain connection to *No Child...*)

B. Exercise: Party Quirks—Natural Gifts

1. One student volunteer is party host; three are party guests.

2. Other students in class submit ideas for the natural gifts/talents the party guests may possess; host attempts to guess natural gifts.

C. Discussion

1. Afterwards, students brainstorm circumstances in the characters’ lives that may keep the talent from being expressed.

2. Students identify which combination of talent and circumstance might make the most interesting play.

3. Students brainstorm additional ideas of gifts people might have and circumstances that would keep those gifts from being expressed.

(cont.)

4. For further discussion: “What existing stories follow this same theme?”
5. Final thought: This doesn’t have to be just an assignment. Pick a topic that is important to you.

Assessment: Students will create a written brainstorm list of different uses of the theme and will select a topic from the brainstorm for writing their own play.

IV. Playwriting Fundamentals

(Objective 2)

* Ask students what area of writing a play they are most concerned about (setting, character, or dialogue); then choose the appropriate exercise. More exercises can be done if there is additional time. (Each exercise lasts about 10 minutes.)

- A. Setting Exercise: Trading Places
 1. Establish a basic relationship and conflict for two student actors.
 2. Improvise scene twice—once in a logical setting for scene, once in a setting that might not be totally logical for scene.
- B. Discussion
 1. Students discuss which scene was more interesting and why.
 2. For further discussion: “How is setting a creative choice? Why is ‘Where else could my scene be placed?’ an important question?”

Assessment: 1) Students will analyze sample scene and suggest settings that may lead to intriguing action. 2) Students will look at their own plays and create list of optional settings that they could use.

- A. Character Exercise: Wizard’s Waiting Room
 1. Three students play their characters and defend their objective to a wizard’s secretary who wants to know “Why should the wizard grant your wish (objective)?”
- B. Discussion
 1. Students decide which wish they would grant if they were the wizard.
 2. For further discussion: stakes and obstacles.

Assessment: 1) Students will restate the principles of strong character objectives. 2) Students will create brainstorm list of specific suggestions for strengthening the objectives presented.

- A. Dialogue Exercise: The Most Popular Word in School
 1. Students brainstorm list of popular slang (exclude expletives).
 2. Two students improvise scene of two students talking about activity at a school dance, first using absolutely no slang and then using as much slang as possible.
- B. Discussion
 1. Ask students if they saw different character types and to define those types.
 2. For further discussion: “How can word choice communicate character?”

Assessment: Students will analyze how the word choice of actors created two different characters in their imagination.

VI. Conclusion

* Always leave time for final questions.

FINAL THOUGHT: We want to hear your stories. Please tell us what you think is going right in the world, and what is going wrong. What needs fixing, and what needs celebrating. We are listening.