

Play Writing Lesson (Drama/theatre, teamwork, writing)

Objectives and Outcomes:

- To shine light on the process of putting on a play from start to finish
- To bolster teamworking skills by giving students individual roles and having them work together on a finished product
- To work on dramatic skills, specifically with voice and body

Grade Level: 5th to 8th

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials Needed: index cards, pencils and paper, (optionally) topics to draw out of a hat

I. Introduction (five minutes)

- A. Start discussion by asking students what roles there are in putting on a play. The three roles to highlight in this discussion are **actor**, **director**, and **playwright**. Make sure students know what the job of each of those people is (actor performs in the play, director tells actors what to do on the stage, and playwright writes the play)
- B. Split students into groups of 4-6, have them find their own place in the room (as much space as possible) and hand them bunches of index cards with different letters on them (A, D, P). There should be one D card per group, one P card per group, and enough A cards for the rest of the members of the group. Instruct students that they will be putting on their own short plays (one to two minutes).
 1. The students with the A cards will be onstage for the short play.
 2. The student with the D card will be directing the play.
 3. The student with the P card will be mainly writing the play.
- C. (optionally) If you have reason to believe students will be unsure of what they want to write their play about, I would recommend bringing in a hat with slips of paper that have suggestive words on them for the students to draw out of. These suggestions can be anything, and if there is another objective that you have with the class (teaching genre, tone, etc.), you can use those sorts of words for the students to draw as jumping off points for their short plays.

II. Playwriting (ten minutes)

- A. Have the playwright get a pencil and a piece of paper, and give them one minute to discuss with their group what the plot of the play will be.
- B. After giving groups a minute to discuss what they want their play to be, instruct the playwright to write. Make sure students know there is a time limit so the class is able to move to the next parts of the lesson.
- C. Check in with groups periodically to make sure they are not overwhelmed by the task but also to make sure they are working. Help students as necessary.

III. Directing (six minutes)

- A. Ideally, scripts will be written by now. Instruct directors that they will now be deciding where actors will be going on the stage at the different parts of the play.
 - B. Describe and model a directing style that is more focused around collaboration. Tell students to use constructive criticism as opposed to making judgments, and encourage them to work with their actors to make decisions that are comfortable and make sense for everybody.
 - C. The playwright should assist the director in making sure that the staging fits the vision of the script.
- IV. Rehearsal (four minutes)**
- A. After groups have finished the directing stage, tell groups they have four minutes left to rehearse their short plays. If a group says they're done, tell them to rehearse it again!
- V. Performance (ten minutes)**
- A. Have students group up in an audience in front of a clear stage space sitting with their groups. Call groups up to perform their plays. Be sure to highlight details that were clearly shown (e.g. "I could tell that this was a drama", "I could tell what was going on through the whole play"), and offer constructive criticism about what they could improve next time (e.g. "There could have been more volume/vocal energy", "Commit more to your choices")
- VI. Wrap-up (five to ten minutes)**
- A. Lead a discussion with students asking them about their feelings about the lesson. Example discussion questions include:
 1. What was directing/acting/writing like? Did you like doing your job? What would you do differently next time? What did you find easy about your job? What did you find difficult?
 - B. If time permits, end with a game.

Modification and Differentiation

The timeframe on this lesson plan is relatively loose. Constantly be checking in with your students and see what their needs are and if they need more time. Decide how long their plays will be based on how many groups there are, and tell them how long their plays should be from the get-go.

In this very general framework, my emphasis is on putting the students on a time-crunch so they don't have time to overthink what they're doing, and then you can spend more time at the end discussing what it felt like for the students to do their individual jobs, work collaboratively in their group, and seeing if they discovered anything about themselves. This is not a required emphasis, this general lesson can absolutely be tailored to emphasize other teaching objectives.