

# IN MY OWN VOICE:

## Responding to Life and Literature Through Playwriting

*A Curriculum Guide for  
Secondary English and Language Arts  
Teachers*

**stages**  
theatre company

[www.stagestheatre.org](http://www.stagestheatre.org)

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# INTRODUCTION

## WELCOME!

Words, gestures, and actions are the tools of daily human communication. This guide is meant to foster writing that expresses ideas and concepts in ways that can be engaging and fun. The activities range in complexity from simple monologue and dialogue writing to more advanced scenes. Some of the basic exercises can be accomplished in a single classroom period. Others have numerous extensions that can last for several sessions. All are adaptable to various curricular themes and content, and they have been tested with students in a wide variety of age groups and settings.

Although the main focus of these strategies is to link student writing with literature, they can also be used to develop original written material that can be presented by groups of students in an informal public presentation. It is our hope that teachers will adapt the activities in this guide to best suit the needs of their particular classrooms.



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# ABOUT STAGES THEATRE COMPANY

## Mission Statement

Stages Theatre Company is committed to the enrichment and education of children and youth in a professional theatre environment that stimulates artistic excellence and personal growth.

Based in Hopkins, Stages Theatre Company serves communities throughout the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota through its production, education and school outreach programs. Since 1984, Stages Theatre has involved young people in the theatre arts through opportunities on stage, backstage, in the audience and in the classroom. Stages Theatre is currently the third largest nonprofit theatre producer in Minnesota and one of the largest professional theatres for young audiences in the country, serving approximately 130,000 young people and their families each year.

## Our Core Values

- ◇ **Integrity:** we sustain the highest level of integrity as individuals and as an organization.
- ◇ **Accessibility:** we overcome barriers that block points of entry into Stages Theatre Company.
- ◇ **Innovation:** we embrace a continual process of renewal and experimentation in theatre and arts education.
- ◇ **Collaboration:** we foster collaboration among professional artists and youth to create exceptional theatre.
- ◇ **Entertainment:** we maintain a commitment to entertain our audience in diverse ways.
- ◇ **Challenge:** we design programs that inspire students, artists and audiences.
- ◇ **Stability:** we ensure organizational stability through fiscal responsibility, long range planning, assessment and retention of quality professional staff.

## Contact Information

Stages Theatre Company  
Hopkins Center for the Arts  
1111 Mainstreet  
Hopkins, Minnesota 55343

Administration: (952) 979-1123

Box Office: (952) 979-1111

Web site: [www.stagestheatre.org](http://www.stagestheatre.org)

This curriculum guide can be downloaded from the Internet free of charge at: [www.stagestheatre.org](http://www.stagestheatre.org)

# OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE

FROM

# STAGES THEATRE COMPANY

## Productions

What better way to introduce students to the magic of theatre than attending a live performance with youth and adult actors? See the Stages Theatre Company Web site for the current season of performances, at least two of which each year are geared specifically for middle and high school levels audiences. Group leaders receive a study guide to the production, including pre- and post-show readings and learning activities.

## Resident Artists in the Classroom

Our residencies provide opportunities for K-12 students and teachers to work closely with skilled theatre artists. These high-quality, creative drama programs assist schools in expanding their own arts curriculum. Students are challenged in a positive, supportive and constructive atmosphere that culminates in a final demonstration of skills. Each program is customized to the needs of a particular school and age group. Teachers select from numerous topics designed to ignite imagination and further education.

## Workshops for Students

Do you have students interested in learning more about theatre? Summer and Winter holiday workshops are a great opportunity for young people to explore theatre experiences in a fun and engaging environment. For the more serious student actor, the Acting Conservatory offers young actors ages 12-18 the opportunity to study the craft of acting for the stage in a comprehensive program. Students will explore the fundamentals of acting, voice and movement along with other skills to train the young actor for public performance.

## Introductory Acting Curriculum Guide

With the K-6 Theatre Curriculum, we share our expertise in introducing children to the world of theatre. The more than 50 warm-ups and learning activities, all written in accessible language and format, focus on specific skills of acting, dramatizing stories and making meaning through theatre. Activities may be used with students in a variety of different grade and ability levels and within multiple content areas. Sample units demonstrate how teachers and curriculum leaders may strategically pull activities from the K-6 Theatre Curriculum to support a specific classroom drama project and/or the Minnesota theatre arts content standards.

Although this guide is written for elementary school teachers and students, almost all of the warm ups and learning activities included are used by Stages Theatre Company educators with youth and adults as well. This makes a great companion piece to *In My Own Voice: Responding to Life and Literature through Playwriting*.

Please visit  
[www.stagestheatre.org](http://www.stagestheatre.org)  
or call (952) 979-1123  
for more information  
on any of these  
resources or  
opportunities.

## Workshops for Teachers

Our theatre educators work closely with teachers throughout the metro area and Greater Minnesota to share their expertise in acting, playwriting, movement, and voice. Workshops can be tailored to the specific needs and interests of the classroom educators, whether as part of a residency, a long-term consulting relationship, or a stand-alone workshop session.

# THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

## Introduction

To write this curriculum guide, playwrights and theater educators Buffy Sedlachek and Mark Rosenwinkel shared their favorite introductory playwriting activities they have successfully used with students throughout their many years in the classroom. Rachel Brown, a curriculum writer and former 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher, led the editing process through which Buffy, Mark, Rachel and Sandy Boren-Barrett selected and then refined the activities you will find in this guide. We selected activities that would:

- maximize student learning, response, and engagement;
- be adaptable for use in responding to fiction, non-fiction, or personal experience; and,
- be accessible for secondary level teachers with any level of experience with drama and playwriting.

**Buffy Sedlachek** is a resident artist with Stages Theatre Company, Literary Manager of The Jungle Theatre, and a nationally produced playwright as well as film and stage actor. A former Jerome Fellow, she has received two Fellowships from The Minnesota State Arts Board, and two Jones Commissions, as well as three McKnight Advancement Grants. Nominated three times for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for distinguished women playwrights and she is the only playwright to have been selected four times for the Playlabs. Most recently, The Great American History Theatre produced her plays about *Swede Hollow*, while her play, *Tamarack*, premiered at the Jungle Theater. Her musical adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* tours nationally every holiday season, and has been translated for upcoming international tours. Buffy has written stage adaptations of numerous literary works for children. In her work as a theatre educator, she has co-written *Playwriting in the Classroom*, published in 1987 under the auspices of the Dayton Hudson Arts Initiative. She has also written curriculum with the Annenberg Arts Programs and for the Guthrie Schools on Stage Program and is a member of the ACE Theatre Project with the Perpich Center for Arts Education. Former director of The Young Playwrights Summer Conference at Hamline University, she has been teaching theatre arts at the K-12 and post-secondary levels for nearly three decades.

**Mark Rosenwinkel** is a resident artist with Stages Theatre Company, Core Member of the Playwrights' Center, a former Jerome Fellow, and a participant in Playlabs. His plays have had productions, readings and workshops with numerous theaters around the country. He has also written many plays for young audiences, most notably his adaptation of *Moby Dick*, which was chosen as the North American representative to the International Association for Theatre for Young Audiences (ASSITEJ) Festival in Russia, 1996, and is published by Dramatic Publishing Co. His most recent play, *Sanctus*, was named winner of the 2002 Writers' Digest Literary Award. His current project, *Dreams of a Bird Woman*, based on the life and legend of Sacagawea, is scheduled for production by Stages Theatre in Hopkins this winter. Mark has taught acting and playwriting at such institutions as Concordia University, St. Paul, and St. Mary's University. In addition, he has been intensely involved in a variety of arts residencies as a Resident Artist with Stages Theatre. He also served as Drama Specialist for the Blake School, and continues to coordinate a series of highly successful summer music theatre camps at Concordia University and the Phipps Center for the Arts, Hudson, WI. He holds an MFA in theatre from Asolo Conservatory in Sarasota, FL.

# THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM CONT.

**Rachel Brown**, M.Ed., Secondary English and M.A., English Literature, is a curriculum and assessment writer who edited the K-6 standards-based theatre curriculum *Make a Scene!* and wrote 17 theatre study guides for Stages Theatre Company. Recent projects have included curriculum development for educational Web sites that allowed students to follow former Governor Ventura's trade mission trips to Japan and China and a teacher's guide to MPR online programming. She has served as a performance assessment writer for the Department of Children, Families & Learning as well as for numerous non-profit organizations with educational programming. A former middle school Language Arts teacher, Brown currently is a doctoral student in the University of Minnesota's Department of Educational Policy & Administration.

**Sandy Boren-Barrett** has been the Program Director of Stages Theatre Company since 1990, allowing her to pursue her dual passion for arts education and theatre. Managing a team of artists and educators, she directs artists residency programs, workshops for children and youth, curriculum development projects, workshops and presentations for artists and educators, and many other collaborative arts ventures with schools and teachers. She has written several articles for publication on the topic of arts integration in the classroom, serves on the design team for the Minneapolis Public Schools initiative - Arts for Academic Achievement, and collaborated on the Stages Theatre Company's standards-based theatre curriculum *Make A Scene! A K-6 Theatre Curriculum*. An accomplished director, she has directed over 25 productions at Stages Theatre Company, including this season's *A Christmas Carol* and *Dreams of a Bird Woman: the Sacagawea Story*.

**Emilie Shields** began her relationship with Stages Theatre Company in 2001, heading up their Target First Job in the Arts Program. Since then, she has developed several study guides for their productions including; *Romeo & Juliet* and *Lord of the Flies*. Shields received her MFA in Drama & Theatre for Youth from the University of Texas at Austin. While at UT, she served as the Outreach Coordinator for the Department of Theatre and Dance, where she created educational materials for school audiences including web sites, videos, and both student and teacher workshops. Shields is currently living and working in Denver, CO.

Special thanks to the following educators and theater artists whose expert critique and sensitive comments enhanced this curriculum guide:

- Karen Duke, ELL Teacher, St. Paul Public Schools
- Patty Feld, Edge of the Woods Theater Artist, Big Fork, MN
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- Katie Leo, Theater Artist and Educator, Stages Theatre Company
- Emily Lilja, Teacher, Anthony Middle School, Minneapolis
- Bruce Rowan, Theater Artist and Educator, Stages Theatre Company

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# ACTOR NEUTRAL

## Warm Up Activity

### SUMMARY

Students practice assuming a neutral physical stance that can be used as a base for developing movements and characters. Use to signal the beginning and end of any acting activities; to encourage physical awareness and self-control.

### OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Establish an effective, physically neutral position.	Student stands upright, feet shoulder length apart, shoulders relaxed, arms at his or her sides, looking straight ahead with no expression. Arms or legs are not crossed, no hands in pockets, no smiles, no head turns.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Have students find a spot in the room where they can see you. Discuss what the word "neutral" means. For example, "Neutral is like a blank sheet of paper before a painter begins to paint. It is a like a car that has its engine running, but isn't moving anywhere yet."
2. Tell students that the first thing they must do as an actor is to find out what neutral is for them. Actor neutral is established when an actor stands upright, feet shoulder length apart, shoulders relaxed, arms at his or her sides, looking straight ahead with no expression. Nothing can be crossed, no hands in pockets, no smiles, no head turns.
3. Demonstrate your actor neutral to students. Demonstrate positions that are not actor neutral.
4. Let students practice finding actor neutral. Then, tell them to go to a position that is not neutral (this can be anything) until you call out "show me actor neutral." Repeat this several times. Walk from student to student and comment on their neutral stance.
5. Repeat often and use during other acting activities.



### TIPS

- ◇ Give feedback to students on their neutral stance.
- ◇ Look for students' particular stances or mannerisms and coach them to neutralize them.
- ◇ Have students find actor neutral at the start and end of all activities and work on scenes. Also, use the term and concept, actor neutral, to focus students' attention.



# BALL OF SOUND

## Warm Up Activity

### SUMMARY

Students toss an imaginary ball around a circle. With each toss, the thrower makes a noise that reflects the way the ball is being handled. Then, the person who catches the "ball" imitates the thrower's noise, develops a new noise, and throws it to another person. Use to pull students together; before activities in which students use their voices to communicate character, action, or emotion; to introduce a sense of playfulness.

### OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Warm up vocally.	Student uses a range of pitches and volumes. Creates sounds that reflect how the ball is being handled.
Take risks.	Student tries a variety of sounds and movements.
Think quickly, creatively, and spontaneously.	Student generates new sounds and movements rather than only repeating other students' ideas. Responds quickly, maintaining the speed of the play.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Students stand in a circle or along the outer edge of the classroom. One student begins by tossing an imaginary ball to another student. As the ball is tossed, the student makes a strong and open sound such as "hey," "weeee," or "whoosh." The sound should reflect the way in which the ball is being handled. For example, if a player gives the ball a very high toss, she might make the sound "keeeeeeee!" starting at a high pitch and sliding to a low one. If she treats the ball as if it is heavy and large, she might make a low "wooooo" sound.
2. The student who catches the ball should respond by imitating the thrower's sound, then developing a different sound and throwing it to another person.



### TIPS

- ◇ Encourage students to experiment with the pitch and volume of their sounds and the size and shape of the ball.
- ◇ If students are dropping the ball or are letting it fall between two students, have the thrower point to the intended catcher.
- ◇ Coach students to think of a sound so they are ready once the ball is thrown to them.
- ◇ At the end of the warm up, have a student store the ball in their mouth or pocket and have them bring it out when it is time to play again.

# IMMERSION LIST

## Warm Up Activity

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### SUMMARY

Students immerse themselves in writing a list of everybody they have ever known. The writing time is usually about three to five minutes. It is not the list itself that is the focus, but the immersion in the list-making that is at the heart of this warm up. Use to get students warmed up for writing and creative thinking and to develop writing fluency. Use this warm up over and over again.

### OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Immerse themselves in the list-making.	Student focuses on own writing without looking at others. Does not ask questions or request feedback on list while writing. Writes continuously and steadily. Generates a substantial list of people.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Ask students to prepare writing materials and clear their desk of other items.
2. Give the following directions: *Start now. Start making a list of everybody you've ever known. That's it. That is the entire direction. Start anywhere, but you must start now. A list of everybody you've ever known. Spelling is not important. If you remember them and have forgotten the name, write a word or two that will remind you who that was. There is no talking; there is only writing at this time. I can answer no questions. Please continue writing. A list of everybody you've ever known.*

**Note:** Students may interpret these directions in various ways, including people they know well, people in the class, people they vaguely know, people they know of, etc. Do not engage with students in a discussion of which of these categories is right. It is not the list that is important but the student immersion in the list-making. Each time students do this warm up, their lists will be different.

**Immersion List continued on next page...**

# IMMERSION LIST

## Warm Up Activity

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3. As students write, monitor the progress of the room and time the writing period. As long as the students remained immersed, continue timing. This writing may continue for up to five minutes; three minutes seems average. Call time.
4. Discuss the lists as you have time. Explain that the purpose of this warm up was to immerse themselves in writing and the list-making. Were students able to immerse themselves in their thoughts of the people, recalling certain events, smells, tastes, sounds, or feelings?



### TIPS

- ◇ Repeat this activity over and over again. List making is a valuable tool for immersion into writing and focused thinking. Each time one makes a list of everybody one has ever known the list will reveal itself in a different order.
- ◇ If you are using this warm up before a writing activity that needs no verbal directions, have students write their immersion list of everyone they know and then simply move from the list writing to the writing assignment whenever they are ready.
- ◇ To extend this warm up, ask students to start with another sheet of paper or the back of the first one and give the following direction:  
*Start now. Start making a list of famous people, living or dead, that you have not met, whom you would like to meet.*
- ◇ To extend this warm up into scene writing, ask students to choose a character from the list of everybody they've ever known, and to choose a character from the list of famous people. Put the two characters together in a scene. The person they know has something the famous person wants. The famous person must try to get it. What is it that the famous person wants? Is it tangible or intangible? What are the obstacles? How are they overcome? Can the famous person get what they want? How direct is the asking? Write the scene.

# SNAP GAME

## Warm Up Activity

### SUMMARY

Students "toss" a finger snap around a circle, changing the character and quality of the snap. Use before ensemble building activities or to focus the group.

### OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Warm up upper body.	Student uses a range of movements. Moves freely.
Work cooperatively with others.	Student maintains eye contact with tosser/catcher. Includes all members of the circle.
Take risks.	Student tries a variety of snap styles and attitudes.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Arrange students in a circle.
2. Practice snapping and tossing finger snaps into the center of the circle. Snaps may be tossed in a variety of ways, including overhand, with a spin, underhand, with a flick of the wrist, etc. Encourage creativity.
3. Demonstrate how to toss a snap to another person by tossing snaps back and forth with a student across from you. As you pass the snap, maintain eye contact with the student to whom you are passing it.
4. Have students pass the snap around and across the circle without speaking. Eye contact between the tosser and catcher are essential.
5. Once students have mastered snap passing, have them change the character and quality of the snap as they pass it onto another person.



#### TIPS

- ◇ Use claps instead of snaps if necessary.
- ◇ The timing of catching and throwing the snaps should be as swift and coordinated as the timing of a real ball.

# ZIP, ZAP, ZOP

## Warm Up Activity

### SUMMARY

Standing in a circle, students "pass" the words zip, zap, zop across the circle, making eye contact and clapping as they pass the word. Use this to bring students together, to focus attention, and to build group awareness and sensitivity.

### OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Maintain focus.	Student keeps focused on the activity, even when not passing or receiving the zip, zap, zop.
Listen to and watch group members.	Student makes eye contact with group members. Listens and watches group member to be available for passings.
Respond to group members.	Student accepts the zip, zap, zop from other students.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Students stand in a circle. One student begins by establishing eye contact with another student. The first student claps her hands and says to the other student, "Zip."
2. Student two establishes eye contact with another student and says, "Zap."
3. That third student then establishes eye contact with yet another student and says, "Zop."
4. The fourth student establishes eye contact with another student and says, "Zip." Continue passing the zip, zap, zops across and around the circle. The goal of the warm up is to go as fast as possible and to maintain a consistent speed.



### TIPS

- ◇ Have students begin the game using a ball that they throw when they say zip, zap, zop. Then, once they get the flow of the activity, take the ball away and have them add the hand clap.
- ◇ This warm up may be done with students standing at their desks.
- ◇ Add a second zip, zap, zop cycle, running simultaneously with the first.
- ◇ Try a directional zip, zap, zop. Have students pass the zip immediately to the right, the zap immediately to the left and the zop to anyone across the circle.

# FREEZE FRAME

telling stories

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## SUMMARY

Students create characters and sequence stories by making frozen pictures that incorporate the use of body and face. This activity is presented in a series of developmental rounds, which once done in sequence, creates a set of skills that can be used over and over again with different stories and purposes.



### KEY CONTENT

Sequencing  
Conflict  
Cause and effect  
Using movement to  
create scenes  
Informal presentation  
Creating dialogue  
Imagination  
Learning new vocabulary

### TIME

Series of rounds done over  
multiple class periods.  
Each round grows  
increasingly lengthy.  
Round One  
can be 10-20 minutes  
By round four, at least 40  
minutes may be needed

### SPACE

Classroom - open space

### GROUPING

Whole class, Small groups

### MATERIALS

None



## PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE/PRIOR EXPERIENCE

- ◇ None

## OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Create a picture that has meaning, using their bodies.	Something on the body bends. The performing student is not looking at teacher or at other students, but remains "inside the picture."
Create strong character emotions, using only the body and the face.	The face has expression that links to the body shape.
Explore levels in the frozen pictures.	Each actor in the team is in a different pose.
Create a sequence of freeze frames that tell a story.	Each freeze frame clearly results from the previous freeze frame. Cause and effect between the scenes are clear.
As audience members, create spoken language for the frozen characters.	Audience members, as playwrights, create lines for the character that emphasize the character's needs or feelings.
Create connecting moments, add language and "thaw it out" as moving performance.	Using the lines created, the "thawed out" story retains the sense of the originally created physical characterizations.

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# FREEZE FRAME

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## USE *FREEZE FRAME* TO...

- ◇ Sequence events, whether from literature, personal experiences or current events.
- ◇ Organize a story (fiction or non) into its essential dramatic moments.
- ◇ Explore possible scenes not shown in the story.
- ◇ Create a new story for performance.
- ◇ Embody characters.
- ◇ Work with stories without the use of spoken language as the primary tool.
- ◇ Create some organized silliness and fun.
- ◇ Learn over and over again.

## PREPARATION

- ◇ Decide how many of the rounds will be attempted per day.

## DIRECTIONS

### Overall Structure

The following directions are presented in a series of rounds, each of which can last from 10 - 40 minutes. A class session can consist of one to three different rounds. The overall sequence of the rounds is very important in that there is developmental work going on. Once the sequence of all rounds is complete and a skill base established, the activity can be repeated and modified in many different ways. See the *Modification & Extensions* section for some ideas.

### Warm Ups

Begin every session with some basic stretching. *Actor Neutral* is a good warm up to use for all Rounds. *Ball of Sound* is good for Rounds that use language. See the Warm Ups section of this guide.

### Reflection

When appropriate, end each session with a brief period of reflection, focusing on what was easy/hard and what students noticed or experienced.



# FREEZE FRAME

telling stories

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"This activity is a very effective introduction to a story unit. It's a great launching point for many other activities."



## Round One: Actors Freeze (10 minutes)

1. Students line up across the back of the room, or in the case of a larger class, they make a "U" shape outlining the sides and the back of the classroom, leaving a substantial performance space in the front of the room.
2. Model a simple walk to the front of the room, three seconds of freezing in which you break the vertical line of your body, then move on to the back of the line. Model breaking the vertical line in different ways, if necessary.
3. Every student approaches the front of the room, breaks the vertical line, freezes, and holds for three seconds. The counting of the three seconds begins when the student is still, and is best counted silently by the teacher. Student is released with a "thank you," crosses the performance area (*Note this subtle practice of being in the whole performance space*), and joins the back of the line.
4. Continue in this manner with all the students.

### Coaching:

*"Remember to break the vertical line of your body in some manner."*

*"We are not in the picture with you."*

### Tips:

- ◇ Make the assumption that all students will participate and allow students to pass if really necessary. But keep encouraging and inviting them. Reluctant students will all eventually go in.
- ◇ The audience should focus on noticing the performers' breaking of the vertical line. Very slight bends (ex. a slight head tilt, a bent finger) challenge our powers of observation to read meaning into subtle movements.

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## Round Two: Audience Tells What Happened

1. Ask for a volunteer who can hold a freeze for a very long time (a few minutes) and have them freeze in front of the class.
2. Model at least three different responses as the second character in the freeze. In other words, physically place yourself in relation to the frozen student in three very different ways. For each scene, ask the students to tell the story, using the following three questions:

“Who are we (they)?”

“Where are we (they)?”

"What just happened?"

This modeling can also be done with two students, as long as you guide the second student to respond in physically different positions for each of the three times.

3. Students then take turns creating a two-person scene in front of the whole class. One student will freeze and hold and a second student will respond, creating a relationship to the first freeze. This is done without having any time to practice or plan. It is the audience who then create the story. With teacher guidance and the three questions above, the remaining students in the audience tell the story of scene.
4. Repeat as necessary.

### Tips:

- ◇ Look at the pictures on the sides of Greek urns, famous paintings, or family photos, and show them as freeze-frames. Ask the same three questions: "Who are they?" "Where are they?" "What just happened?"
- ◇ Students often forget to answer the third question, "What just happened?" Note that the question is not "what is happening?" but "what *just* happened?" Or, what was the precipitating event that caused the scene to be as it is? This distinction moves students to tell a story, not just describe a moment, ideally getting at the cause and effect.
- ◇ You can also make larger pictures, using more students, all frozen in service of the telling of a story. Use the same basic questions for the audience to develop the story.

# FREEZE FRAME

telling stories

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## Round Three: Audience Adds the Words

This Round adds simple language to the work of round two.

1. Set up a scene in the same way as in round two, with one student in a frozen position and making a freeze and a second responding to the first.
2. Ask the three questions from round two:
  - “Who are they?”
  - “Where are they?”
  - “What just happened?”
  - “What could he/she be saying?”
3. Then ask the audience to give each character a line to say.
4. After the audience gives each character a line, tell the actors to speak their line whenever their shoulder is tapped (or whenever they are pointed to). Note that this means lines can be repeated.
5. Tap/point at the characters to evoke the lines, repeating lines in different orders, and keeping the language fluid.

**"Everyone I've ever  
taught this to uses  
it for everything!"**



## Round Four: Small Groups Create Sequence of Scenes without Words

1. As a class, brainstorm a list of simple famous stories, nursery rhymes, or fairy tales that all students know. This list might be of previous stories read or studied together. (This is particularly important if, for cultural reasons, students are not familiar with the same stories.)
2. Working in cooperative groups of 3-5, students choose one of the listed stories. The title of the story remains a secret to the other groups. Have students briefly tell the story within their group to make sure that all students know it.
3. Students create three freeze-frames to tell the story, using events from the beginning, middle and end. All members of the team must appear in each freeze frame. Ask students what they will do if there are only two characters in the frozen moment they are presenting. Answer: the other actors will become objects that will help clarify the picture.
4. Teams perform the freeze-frames in sequence, without comment or question from the audience.

**Round Four *continued on next page...***

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# FREEZE FRAME

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## Round Four *cont.*

5. Then each team performs their freeze-frames again. Discuss each one. Some questions:
- ◇ What story were they telling?
  - ◇ As you were looking at the freezes did anyone's freeze make you think of something else? Where were they? What else might have been happening in their picture? Can you tell us one picture that you saw?
  - ◇ What do the face, the arms, the back, the feet, etc. tell you about the characters and the story?

## Round Five: Small Groups Create Sequence of Scenes with Words

Add language to the freeze frames of famous stories, using the methods described in round three.

## MODIFICATIONS & EXTENSIONS

Freeze frames can be used in a variety of ways to support work with literature, personal experiences or current events.

- ◇ Having the spoken language component come towards the end of this activity makes this an effective tool for students with language difficulties.
- ◇ List the events of a story that all students know or are studying. Write the events on slips of paper. In cooperative groups, each group draws a slip and then works with that event to create a series of freeze frames. All teams share their freeze frames and the whole class works to put them in logical order.
- ◇ Students read a news story and then: 1) create freeze frames of the moments reported in the story; 2) create freeze frames of the past or moments just before the story; and/or 3) create freeze frames of imagined consequences from this story at least 6 months, but perhaps as much as ten years into the future.
- ◇ Students create freeze frames of a scene they wish had been in a story.
- ◇ Students freeze frame alternate endings for literature read in class.
- ◇ Students tell each other a simple story from life ["how I got up and got to school today"] and their team acts it out in freeze frames.
- ◇ Brainstorm a list of active verbs around a theme or a story, or event. Student teams use three to five of the active verbs as a basis for freeze frames and organize them into a story.

# DUELING ANTHEMS

enacting conflict

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## SUMMARY

Students explore a conflict between primal forces that exist in a literary work by creating an "anthem" (song, rap, chant, movement) that communicates the values of the particular theme or character. Each of two groups performs their anthem for the other group to demonstrate their side of the conflict.



## KEY CONTENT

Conflict  
Theme  
Language, literal and figurative  
Movement  
Collaboration  
Learning new vocabulary

## TIME

1 class session  
(45 -60 minutes)

## SPACE

Classroom - open space

## GROUPING

Whole class, divided into two or more smaller groups

## MATERIALS

1. Writing materials or word processing tools
2. Simple art materials, such as paper, markers, glue, scissors
3. A story read by the class



## PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE/PRIOR EXPERIENCE

- ◇ Basic knowledge of the literary work or event being explored
- ◇ Previous work with *Freeze Frame* or a similar activity is helpful

## OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Explore the essential nature of conflict within literature.	Student lists various examples of opposing character traits and then includes them in the anthem.
Select language and movement that represent the primal force.	The primal force is clearly present within the language and movement of the anthem.
Deal with fundamental thematic ideas in a quick and playful way.	Energy level and engagement are high. Ideas are listed quickly.
Collaborate with other students on creative writing, movement, and improvisation.	Student actively participates in the small groups.

## USE DUELING ANTHEMS TO...

- ◇ Explore large themes and conflict in literature, current events, or history.
- ◇ Respond to and analyze stories in literature, current events, or history.
- ◇ Play with language, movement, and rhythm.

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# DUELING ANTHEMS

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## PREPARATION

Select the story and two characters with opposing worldviews to be used with the activity.

Some tips for selecting:

- ◇ The characters' worldviews should get at a theme or conflict of the story being explored.
- ◇ It is important to select themes which have positive and negative aspects and legitimate (though conflicting) points of view. Dichotomies such as good/evil should not be used.
- ◇ Select a conceptual conflict, rather than a particular event or action.

## DIRECTIONS

### 1. Warm Up

Students warm up using one or more of the following Warm Ups:

- ◇ Actor Neutral
- ◇ Ball of Sound
- ◇ Snap Game
- ◇ Zip, Zap, Zop

*See the **Warm Ups** section of this guide for directions on each of these activities.*

### 2. Discuss the Two Primal Forces

Most novels or narrative stories can be distilled into a basic conflict between two primal forces, such as Thought vs. Feeling; The Scientist vs. The Artist; etc. These themes often correspond to a protagonist and antagonist with opposing character traits.

**Example:** In Euripedes' *Medea*, Jason can be described as self-serving, political, practical, and level-headed, etc. Medea, on the other hand, could be called exotic, emotional, strong, passionate, magical, etc.

As a whole class, write the names of two opposing major characters found in the literary work. Make a list of traits and/or attributes under each name. Lead the students into seeing the story as some kind of basic conflict of ideas, embodied in these traits. What kind of "worldview" do each of these characters represent?

**Example:** Jason may be seen to represent the view that logic and reason are the basis of sound decision making. Medea might be advocating the need to respond to the world with a great deal of feeling.

Have the class identify two primal forces at work in the story, for example, Thought vs. Feeling, Rational vs. Irrational, or Political vs. Personal. Work with whatever labels the group decides best describes the conflict. This might be challenging for some students so be prepared with some labels. Also, ensure that everyone has a solid understanding of the story and its context before moving into the theme work.

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# DUELING ANTHEMS

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## 3. Divide Into Kingdoms

Divide class into two groups. Each is assigned a "kingdom," based on the primal forces discussed earlier. For example, you could have "Kingdom of the Heart" and "Kingdom of the Mind."

Still with the whole group, make a list of values and virtues in each of these kingdoms. Another way of saying this is to ask what is important to the people in the kingdom.

Also talk about the critique of these values - i.e. the dangers of loving too much, the limitations of our search for knowledge, etc.

**Note:** Immigrants from war-torn countries may have strongly negative connotations for the image of "kingdom" and "dueling." Be sensitive to this possibility and modify as necessary.

## 4. Compose Anthems

Groups go to opposite sides of the room. Each group will have 10 minutes to compose a song, rap or anthem that expounds their kingdom's values in a way that shows their obvious superiority and silences their critics. Note that they are to define their own group and describe their own perspective, not bash the other group.



They may use any style of music, ideally something that suits their values. At the very least, they should have phrases recited to a rhythm, accompanied by gestures or movement. Movements should enhance and support the message being presented with language. They may also design a simple flag or symbol for their kingdom.

## 5. Battle On Opposite Hills

When both groups are ready, explain that in ancient battles opposing armies often assembled on hills, very visible to each other. They often sang songs or performed rituals designed to intimidate the enemy. Have each group perform to the other, with the objective that they will absolutely silence and intimidate the opposing side. They should be encouraged to perform with high energy and vigor to define their own group and describe their own perspective.

If time permits, each individual takes one phrase of their anthem. They meet, two by two, to do "battle" in the center area, using their words and bodies to "fight" the opponent. They must take turns saying their phrases, and they may not touch each other.

# DUELING ANTHEMS

enacting conflict

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## 6. Reflect

Discuss with the whole class:

- ◇ Are these two primal forces representative of the events and themes of the story? In what way does the literary work not adhere to them?
- ◇ Do characters who come from these opposing world views always act in accordance with these values? Or do the characters vary or change? How does being exposed to different perspectives impact them? Discuss examples from life and literature.
- ◇ What other artistic works (books, movies, songs, poems, visual art, dance, plays) encompass the conflict between these forces? What events in history? What current events?

**A Note on Grouping:** If necessary, you can work with more than two groups. Still work with two primal forces, but assign two or more small groups to each primal force. Then have the groups "battle" in various combinations. Also discuss the differences between or among the various groups representing the same primal force.

## MODIFICATIONS & EXTENSIONS

- ◇ Students with verbal language difficulties can be encouraged to respond with movement; student with movement difficulties can be encouraged to respond with words.
- ◇ Have English language learners create or perform their anthem in their native language.
- ◇ A similar lesson can be to use the idea of "place" within the literary material. Physical locations in stories often represent larger "worlds" with thematic ideas. First, make a list of these locations. Pick three or four that seem to be the most important or evocative. Imagine them in greater detail, using vivid, sensory adjectives and active verbs. Divide the class into three or four groups. Each has ten minutes to compose an anthem based on their "world." To give it some structure, tell them that their "reenactment" should involve some kind of group rhythm, sound effects or music, some kind of language, and a surprise. Share them with the larger group, perhaps linking them in sequence.

**"This is perfect for  
*Romeo and Juliet*.  
It is great to  
show how in  
Shakespearean text,  
words ARE action."**





# MUNDANE DIALOGUE

exploring hidden meaning

Page 1 of 4

## SUMMARY

Students explore the potential subtext of dialogue. Working in pairs, students write a short scene of dialogue that gives no information. Students first perform the scene in a neutral manner. Each pair then selects a secret which one character knows concerning the other. The students perform the same scene again, letting the characters' secrets impact the delivery of the dialogue and creating characters in a particular situation.



## KEY CONTENT

Writing dialogue  
Subtext  
Conflict  
Character  
Presenting a short scene  
(neutral, acting)  
Collaboration  
Learning new vocabulary

## TIME

1 class session  
(45 -60 minutes)

## SPACE

Classroom - at desks  
Classroom - in open space

## GROUPING

Pairs for writing  
Whole class for  
presentation

## MATERIALS

Writing materials or  
word processing tools



## PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE/PRIOR EXPERIENCE

- ◇ Experience with the warm up Actor Neutral helps get at the concept of a presentation done in neutral.

See the **Warm Ups** section of this guide for directions on Actor Neutral

## OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Write a short dialogue.	The ten-line dialogue is complete and uses mundane language.
Present the dialogue with a neutral delivery.	Dialogue is presented in a flat, neutral, emotionless manner. Not bored, just flat.
Use subtext (a character's secret) to create drama.	The second dialogue delivery is clearly different from the neutral one.

## USE MUNDANE DIALOGUE TO...

- ◇ Introduce dialogue writing
- ◇ Explore character motivation
- ◇ Show how action and vocal inflection convey meaning

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# MUNDANE DIALOGUE

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## PREPARATION

- ◇ Prepare a sample mundane dialogue to show to students (on a whiteboard, overhead or via a computer projection system).
- ◇ Teachers may want to pair students in advance for maximum productivity.

"This one is great fun!"



## DIRECTIONS

### 1. Introduction

As a whole class, discuss the word "mundane." Agree on a definition such as "ordinary" or "neutral." Emphasize that it is the opposite of interesting or unusual.

This is a great time to review or introduce Actor Neutral.

See the **Warm Ups** section of this guide for directions on Actor Neutral

### 2. Write Draft

Students work in pairs. The assignment is to write ten lines of mundane dialogue. No character. No character names. No past. No future. No plans are being made. No conflict. No story. No plot. No details, either emotional or environmental.

Each student must have their own copy of the full scene in order to present it.

Gather the whole group together. Discuss the challenges of removing detail. Help them to understand that a mundane scene needn't have any life. That's the point. Life will be breathed into it later. We promise.

#### Sample 1:

Doin?  
Nothin. You?  
Nothin.  
Some weather.  
Uh-huh.  
Doin tonight?  
Nothin. You?  
Dunno.  
See ya.  
Bye.

#### Sample 2:

Hey.  
Hey.  
What's up?  
Nothing.  
Ok.  
You?  
Nope.  
Ok.  
Gotta go.  
Bye.

# MUNDANE DIALOGUE

exploring hidden meaning

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## 3. Present in Neutral (no acting)

Partners take turns presenting their scene in neutral to the class. They stand facing each other, in body neutral, and read the scene with no acting. Robotic. Not bored, that's an easily playable attitude. Flat. Fast. Be scrupulous about insisting on a lack of acting. The most successful scenes will be the most neutral and mundane.

Ask the audience:

- ◇ What do we know about these characters? Notice how easy it is to get a conflict into a ten-line scene. It only takes a word. Discuss what word or words in the written dialogue told them something about the character or conflict.
- ◇ How neutral is the scene?

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** If while in the pursuit of a mundane scene they inadvertently created one with life and story, more power to them. To have created something of theatrical substance in ten lines is not a failure by any stretch of the imagination!

## 4. Add A Secret

After a round of neutrally written and neutrally presented scenes, we add acting, which adds character, character needs, and story. All they have to do is to add a secret. One character has a secret. That's all. No rewrite. Just one secret.

**Sample Secrets:**

- ◇ **Character A** knows that **Character B** flunked the history test.
- ◇ **Character A** has just stolen money from **Character B**.
- ◇ **Character A** is moving out of the country tomorrow.

The partners tell no one. They prepare to perform their scene with one character having a secret. Of course both actors know the secret, just as in any play, an actor would know the whole. But, the other character does not have a clue.

**Example:**

- ◇ **Character A** is secretly dating **Character B's** boyfriend.
- ◇ **Actors** playing **A** and **B** both know this but **Character B** does not. Nor does the audience.

In the process of discussing and deciding upon their character's secret, students will inevitably be talking about the situation, the characters and their relationship to each other, and a place. This is the point. But there should be no changes made in the actual dialogue.

Have students quickly practice out their scene with the secret. Circulate among them and select one to present as an example. This can be done with two students or a student and the teacher.

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## 5. Present in Neutral with Secret and with Acting (with the secret)

Gather as a group again. Each pair of students performs the scenes twice in succession, beginning with one that you have selected as a good example.

First they perform in full neutral; the second time is done with the secret and is fully acted. Some possible questions for the audience:

- ◇ Which character has the secret? Read the body, face, and gesture to see. Watch for tiny behavioral details.
- ◇ How does the secret affect the other character? Again, notice details.
- ◇ What is the relationship between the characters?
- ◇ Where are they?
- ◇ Can you tell what the secret is?

**"This is a terrific exercise to begin to differentiate between the written words and the meaning behind them."**



## 6. Reflect

Reflect with students on the ease with which they were able to write dialogue and the importance of actors and subtext to create tension and story. Talk about how much of the characters' non-spoken agendas are revealed using very few words.

## MODIFICATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

- ◇ It's important to remember that non-verbal communication is culture-specific, so there might be differences in how students will play it out. Explore such differences, if appropriate.
- ◇ This is a great exercise to address non-verbal communication patterns and conventions with non-native speakers. Note that such students might need extra modeling and specific examples to get started.

You can build other scenes around the mundane one:

- ◇ Write dialogue to a scene between the same two characters (and/or other characters) in which the secret was first discovered by the character who knows it.
- ◇ Write a scene after the original mundane dialogue scene that reveals a surprising consequence of the secret being revealed.
- ◇ Exchange scripts with another pair of students for neutral presentation or to add a secret.

# MONOLOGUE OF EVICTION

exploring character

Page 1 of 7

## SUMMARY

Students write and perform a "monologue of eviction" in which the **speaker** "evicts" the **listener** from their life. The monologue has four clear requirements to guide the writing. Created with characters from literature, current events, or personal experience, these monologues are passionate and in the present, motivated by the **speaker's** strong need to evict the **listener**.

## KEY CONTENT

Conflict  
Character  
Perspective taking  
Cause and effect  
Monologue  
Learning new vocabulary

## TIME

### Session 1

15 min.- intro and example  
35 min.- write and revise

### Session 2

25 min.- small group  
sharing and response  
25 min.- revision

### Session 3

50 min.- share with class

## SPACE

Classroom - at desks or computers & in open space

## GROUPING

Whole class  
Individual work time

## MATERIALS

1. Writing Materials
2. Sample monologue(s)

## PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE/PRIOR EXPERIENCE

- ◇ Familiarity with characters from the literary text or current events, if used.

## OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Write the way people speak.	Colloquial, idiomatic speech, informal language. Language patterns may be different for different cultures.
Write in the passionate voice of a speaker with emotional investment.	Events are expressed through words expressing feeling, not just describing. No wasted flowery adjectives; they dilute passion.
Include believable reasons.	Speaker has believable reasons and strong desire to evict the listener. Cause for eviction is clear.
Create a clear sense of the listener, as well as of the speaker.	The Listener is evoked by the Speaker. Speaker does not have an assumed dialogue with the Listener. There are no imaginary statements from the listener. (Then we have dialogue.)
Write in the present tense.	Active verbs and present tense are used throughout. (To "cheat the tense" when speaking in the past, contractions are used. See the samples at the end of this activity.)

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# MONOLOGUE OF EVICTION

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## USE *MONOLOGUE OF EVICTION* TO...

- ◇ Create a monologue filled with passion and strong emotion. (For example, Henry VIII evicts his wife, rather than kills her. The Chief of Tainos evicts Columbus before the mass destruction.)
- ◇ Identify and explore bad or toxic relationships in a story, or moments where someone endures silently
- ◇ Explore alternative endings to a story. (The imagined eviction would, perhaps, shorten the story.)
- ◇ Discuss cause and effect by changing the course of an historical event.
- ◇ Imagine an eviction that might have happened behind the scenes of a story or event, that may have contributed to the event. (For example, was there an eviction that led to the French Revolution?)

## PREPARATION (*TEACHER*)

- ◇ Decide if characters used will be from literature, current events, or personal experience.
- ◇ Prepare brainstorming prompts.
- ◇ Practice presenting the example monologue.

See the end of this activity for example monologues.

**Note:** Whether writing from fiction, non-fiction, or personal experience, students will naturally align themselves with issues to which they relate emotionally. It is important to stress that students are writing from the “character’s point of view” and in a character’s voice, not their own. This is particularly important if students do this as a writing activity, rather than a response activity, and so are more likely to use potentially sensitive and personal material. Brainstorming with the whole class on possible relationships and evictions can help remove this pressure. The emotional truth of this writing is more important than the factual experience, but the emotional safety for students of this age must also be considered.

# MONOLOGUE OF EVICTION

exploring character

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## DIRECTIONS

### SESSION 1

#### 1. Warm Up

To get students warmed up for writing, do *Immersion List*.

See the **Warm Ups** section of this guide for directions to **Immersion List**.

#### 2. Introduction

Define and discuss the two key terms, writing them on the board/overhead if possible.

- ◇ Monologue: One voice. One character speaking. Discuss how it is different from a dialogue.
- ◇ Eviction: Sending someone away. Putting them out. The eviction in this case is an emotional eviction and is an irrevocable action.

Distinguish between the speaker and the listener. The speaker is a character sending someone, the listener, out of his or her life. Note also the difference between the listener and the audience.

Read one of the examples aloud, with feeling.

See the end of this activity for **Example Monologues**.

#### 3. Select and Explore Character for Monologue

If working with **fiction**:

- ◇ Brainstorm about moments when particular characters might have been better off evicting people from their lives.
- ◇ And/or brainstorm moments in the literature in which an eviction happened, but was done with little theatricality.

If working with **non-fiction** or **current events**:

- ◇ Brainstorm eviction events that one wishes might have happened, hopes will happen or thinks should happen.
- ◇ Brainstorm imagined evictions that might have motivated or created certain factual events.

If working from **personal experience** or **creative writing**:

- ◇ Brainstorm pairs of characters/people who have a relationship that needs to end.

**Note:** Be sure to spend enough time on this step so students have multiple ideas from which to choose.

# MONOLOGUE OF EVICTION

exploring character

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## 4. Introduce the Form

Show the students the four items that the monologue must contain:

1. Fond memories, the early relationship, bonding experiences
2. The little ways in which the speaker has been let down in the past and has forgiven or overlooked the listener's failings
3. The reason why today is the eviction day. The straw that broke the camel's back.
4. The KISS OFF statement [get out, drop dead, etc]

Read the example again and discuss how each of the four requirements is met in the example(s).

Discuss what the monologue may NOT be. It is:

- ◇ NOT a letter
- ◇ NOT a phone call
- ◇ NOT a scene in which the listener interacts with the speaker.

## 5. Write Draft

Working independently, students write a monologue that contains all four requirements.

## SESSION 2

## 6. Present and Revise

Present tense and active verbs make these monologues come alive. Review or discuss how to replace past tense and passive verbs with present tense and active ones. To "cheat the tense" when speaking in the past, use contractions. See the examples at the end of this activity. In small groups, students read monologues to each other, listening for the four parts and for present tense and active verbs. Students make revisions as necessary.

**Note:** Small group sharing prior to the all-class sharing may be helpful, particularly if students have not had much experience reading and sharing with each other. Presenting only within pairs, however, is ineffective for this exercise. The monologue is being written for performance; an audience of at least a small group size is necessary.



# MONOLOGUE OF EVICTION

exploring character

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## SESSION 3

### 7. Present

Students present their monologues to the whole class. The audience listens for and discusses how the speaker and listener are evoked through the monologue. How does the language and delivery used by the speaker accomplish this?

Note: Students who are reluctant to perform may have a friend sit in "actor neutral" onstage with their back to the audience. The person is NOT, however, acting as the listener and should not respond to the speaker. This can serve to give an anxious performer a little moral support.

### 8. Reflect

Discuss the challenges faced while writing this monologue. Also, discuss overall impressions - what they saw and heard - within and throughout the various monologues. If working with a fiction or non-fiction story, reflect on what this activity illuminated about the story, the characters, the conflicts between them, or the events of which they were a part.

## MODIFICATIONS & EXTENSIONS

- ◇ Students with language difficulties may first create the monologue with a graphic organizer divided into the four parts of the monologue. In each portion of the picture are phrases that meet the guidelines.
- ◇ English language learners can write the monologue first in their native language and then translate into English. They may also perform the monologue in their native language.
- ◇ To extend the activity, students write response monologues in which the evictees speak for themselves. Do they reveal themselves to be exactly as described, or are they more complex? Do they see the relationship differently? How do they feel about coming to the end of this road? The greatest challenge with these monologues is to create the evictees' point of view with as much care and integrity as done for the evictors. Make them a worthy adversary.

"My students surprised themselves with how creative they could be."



# MONOLOGUE OF EVICTION

exploring character

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## EXAMPLE MONOLOGUE #1

Written by  
Buffy  
Sedlachek



The day we met, you were my hero. Third grade. Some kids are teasin me. I'm tryin real hard not to cry, or get mad or get in trouble, but it's hard and I think I'm gonna cry, and suddenly there you are! And you're telling em all to mind their own business, and you're not yellin. But you got that low voice that makes you sound all scary, even if you're not. You are always takin care of me like that. Pulling me back when I'm almost crossin the street without looking, carrying my science project home with me, cause it's too big for one person, all like that. Yeah, you are real good at takin care of me, which is why I missed the fact that you ain't exactly takin care of yourself, Serita. Oh, I saw you hangin on the corner with those gang-bangers. And, you tell me, you was just askin a question. An I let it go. And then I see you leanin up the outside of the grocery, and I know you're watchin for cops, and you run off down the street with Michael when he comes out of the store with something under his jacket. And still I'm lookin the other way. I still keep thinking you'll stop. And now, here you are. You been up in my house, stealin money from my Mama's purse, and now I can't look away and there ain't no goin back. You have messed it up, you messed it all up, and I cannot have you in my life. You better drop those bills and hit the road, and you better not look back. You ain't my hero any more.

# MONOLOGUE OF EVICTION

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## EXAMPLE MONOLOGUE #2

Written by  
Buffy  
Sedlachek



I knew from the first time I saw you we were going to be friends. All those kids're bossing me around and you just stop em. You tell em to back off and they back off. And, when you're choosing teams, you choose me first. And we help each other, like you help me rinse the spilled chocolate milk out of my white sweater. And, Mikey knocks my library books on the floor, and you help me pick em up.

And the teacher keeps you in for recess, and everybody teases you, but I don't. But you start playing tricks on people. I see you, making marks in Mikey's notebooks, making his papers all messed up, but I just don't say a word to you about it. And, then, you hide Becky's favorite scarf in the garbage, and pretend to "find it" when she's crying. And I just pretend you got a different sense of humor, until today, when you walk right up to the principal's car and break the taillight on purpose. Your "jokes" aren't funny. They're vandalism. And I can't be friends with somebody so disrespectful. You've played your last mean trick. I am turning you in. Get away from me and stay away from me.

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# FIVE CARD DRAW

starting scenes

Page 1 of 8

## SUMMARY

Students write short scenes, incorporating elements presented to them on character, action, place and object cards. This activity can be a stand-alone activity focused on writing and the four elements, using the sample set of cards provided or other similar ones.



### KEY CONTENT

Character  
Conflict  
Place  
Dialogue  
Collaboration  
Presentation

### TIME

2 class sessions  
(90 - 120 minutes)

### SPACE

Classroom - at desks  
or computers and  
in open space

### GROUPING

Individual writing work  
Whole class and/or small  
group sharing

### MATERIALS

1. Five Card Draw decks with enough cards for every writer
2. Writing materials or word processing tools



To use this activity as a response to literature or non-fiction, create cards inspired by elements from work studied. It should be noted, however, that not ALL of the cards should be specific to the literary or non-fiction work. The purpose is to combine some of the elements of the story/event to create a totally new scene and to explore the various elements, not to simply recreate existing scenes.

## PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE/PRIOR EXPERIENCE

- ◇ The students should have some prior experience with writing dialogue such as in Freeze Frame and Mundane Dialogue.
- ◇ Students should also be familiar with all of the words on the cards. Select characters, places, objects, and actions that will be familiar to all and/or review them beforehand with students.

## OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Write a two-character scene with a place, object, and action.	The scene includes the characters, place, object, and action indicated on the cards.
Explore the relationship between various elements in a piece of dramatic writing - character, place, object, action.	There are clear connections between the various elements in the scene.
Be challenged to write scenes with substantial character-driven action.	Characters drive the action of the scene, rather than being observers of it.

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# FIVE CARD DRAW

starting scenes

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## OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT CONT...

*If cards connect to fiction or non-fiction story being studied ...*

Students will ...	What it looks like...
Use elements of an existing literary work (or non-fiction) to create a unique piece of dramatic writing.	Characters, place, object and/or action reflect what we know of them from the existing literary work but are presented in a new way.

## USE FIVE CARD DRAW TO...

- ◇ Create short scenes as part of a playwriting unit.
- ◇ Respond to literature or non-fiction stories.
- ◇ Explore characters, places, and events.
- ◇ Act as a stand-alone writing activity between other larger units.
- ◇ Enhance creativity and adaptability, over and over again.
- ◇ Explore improvisation.

## PREPARATION

- ◇ Prepare the Five Card Draw cards.

## ABOUT THE CARDS

The cards have the element on one side of the card and a specific idea on the other. Cards can be on slips of paper or card stock. We recommend using a different color paper for each category of cards. (Laminate for long-term use.) See the sample cards at the end of this lesson or create your own.

The ideas on the cards should be vivid and evocative. The Action cards describe the overall action in the scene. They should be striking, yet evoke many possibilities.

If this activity is used in conjunction with a piece of literature, some of the cards may be specifically geared toward its elements. It should be noted, however, that not ALL of the cards should be specific to the literary or non-fiction work. The purpose is to combine some of the elements of the story/event to create a totally new scene and to explore the various elements, not to simply recreate existing scenes.

# FIVE CARD DRAW

starting scenes

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## Examples:

**Character Card:** instead of "an old man," use "An old man who lives with regrets."

**Place Card:** instead of "library," try "The library shelves at midnight."

**Object Card:** instead of "jewelry," use "shiny, gold earrings."

**Action Card:** instead of "an accident," use "An accident reveals a discomfoting truth."

## ROMEO & JULIET Examples:

**Character Card:** "A mysterious friar" "A bawdy best friend" "An overbearing father"

**Place Card:** "A masked ball" "A dusty street in the heat of day" "A tomb"

**Object Card:** "sleeping potion" "wildflowers" "A sword"

**Action Card:** "A good person does a bad deed." "Youthful competition gets out of hand."

## DIRECTIONS

### SESSION 1

#### 1. Draw Five Cards

Assemble the cards in separate piles according to type and ask students to draw the following cards, without looking at them: 2 Character cards, 1 Place card, 1 Object card, and 1 Action card.

#### 2. Review Elements

Students then turn over their cards and contemplate the possibilities for a scene using the information on the cards.

After all the students have gotten their cards, and before they start writing, it is fun to have a one-minute trading session in which any student may trade card(s) with another student or with cards remaining in the pile. After this minute is up, the students must write the scene using the cards that they have.

#### 3. Write

Students write a short scene of dialogue based on the information on all five of their cards. They may combine the information in any way they see fit. Students should write for approximately twenty minutes.

#### Coaching:

"How do we know that the characters are in the "place"?"

"How is the object used in the scene?"

# FIVE CARD DRAW

starting scenes

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## SESSION 2

### 4. Share

Students share their writing in pairs or in small groups.

After an appropriate writing time, the scenes are read and shared with the class. If there is not enough time to read all of them, each of the small groups may select one or two to be read in front of the entire class.

“This is a great activity to use early in a drama unit.”



### 4. Reflect

Notice how all the elements work together to create tension and propel action within a scene.

If using an existing literary work, notice how the various components - characters, place, object, action - can be used in different ways. Identify these elements in other literary works.

#### Other Questions:

- ◇ What did you see in the scene?
- ◇ What words, images or actions will you remember?
- ◇ Does it remind you of anything from the literature?
- ◇ What was the most challenging part of this exercise?

## MODIFICATIONS & EXTENSIONS

- ◇ For students with written language difficulties, use cooperative groups, pairs, or adult support and/or provide more time for writing.
- ◇ Pairs draw a set of cards and then write and improvise a scene together.
- ◇ Groups draw a set of cards and then work together to create a scene with a series of up to five freeze frames. (See **Freeze Frames** activity earlier in this guide.) Then they "thaw out" the freezes and add language to create a short play.

Sample Cards on the following pages...

**In My Own Voice:**  
**Responding to Life and Literature Through Playwriting**

Stages Theatre Company [www.stagestheatre.org](http://www.stagestheatre.org)



# FIVE CARD DRAW

starting scenes

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## CHARACTER CARDS

<b>A person who never takes responsibility</b>	<b>A leader who needs forgiveness</b>	<b>Someone who left people behind</b>
<b>A fortune teller</b>	<b>A TV reporter</b>	<b>A talk-show host</b>
<b>A person who could have done better with his/her life</b>	<b>A person who is doing well in life, at the expense of others</b>	<b>A person who led well, but has lost their way</b>
<b>An identical twin</b>	<b>A fond fool</b>	<b>A mean teacher</b>
<b>A person who once was great, fallen on hard times</b>	<b>Controlling, self righteous companion</b>	<b>A person who tempers justice with mercy</b>
<b>A trusty villain</b>	<b>A witty store owner</b>	<b>A lost sibling</b>
<b>A servant with a deadly secret</b>	<b>A charismatic foreigner</b>	<b>Someone who left people behind</b>
<b>A lost child</b>	<b>A jealous friend</b>	<b>The President</b>
<b>A person with bitter regrets</b>	<b>A circus performer</b>	<b>A child with magical powers</b>

# FIVE CARD DRAW

starting scenes

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## ACTION CARDS

<b>The fulfillment of a longtime desire</b>	<b>An unexpected reunion turns sour</b>	<b>A reunion takes place between two people</b>
<b>Something lost is found</b>	<b>Someone is forgiven</b>	<b>Forgiveness is received</b>
<b>A person or item has disappeared</b>	<b>Power is taken away and given to someone else</b>	<b>An expensive purchase creates havoc</b>
<b>A unpaid bill comes due</b>	<b>Justice is served</b>	<b>A reunion goes awry</b>
<b>A friend becomes an enemy</b>	<b>Someone learns a secret</b>	<b>An enemy becomes a friend</b>
<b>A rigid ruler becomes a loving person</b>	<b>The chickens come home to roost</b>	<b>A memory is found to be unreliable</b>
<b>A gift is received</b>	<b>A promise is broken</b>	<b>A lost child is found</b>
<b>A shipwreck at sea exacts a toll</b>	<b>Someone is allergic to something</b>	<b>Someone can't stop laughing</b>
<b>Someone is angry</b>	<b>Poverty is overcome</b>	<b>A longing is fulfilled</b>
<b>A well known person goes unrecognized</b>	<b>An unexpected reunion brings change</b>	<b>A death sentence is ordered</b>

# FIVE CARD DRAW

starting scenes

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## OBJECT CARDS

Charms	Check for \$1,000,000	Popcorn
Fresh fruit	Chain	Ship supplies
Ring	Colorful new clothing item	Poetry
Fishing pole	Drums	Golden chain
Flowers	Fishing nets	Mirror
Fish	Hundred dollar bill	Jewelry
Lost backpack	History Book	Kaleidoscope
Bicycle	Picnic Basket	Puppy
Lottery ticket	Letter	Carseat

# FIVE CARD DRAW

starting scenes

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## PLACE CARDS

Marketplace, midday	At sea, early morning	Doorway, anytime
Harbor, evening	A holy place	Prison
In a hospital lobby	In the woods, night time	On the sea, years ago
Palace, twilight	Street corner	TV studio
A bright moment in the past	A dark moment in the past	Busy downtown street
Movie theatre	The mall, lunchtime	In an airplane
Art Museum	Counter at a Diner	Baseball Stadium
Video Arcade	Music Concert	Airport ticket counter
On the bus, evening	Elementary school playground	On the bus, morning

# BUFFY'S EDITING TIPS

## KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN FINISHED WITH A FIRST DRAFT...

### 1. Are your characters showing through action, not telling with words?

Examine the scene for action. Characters are more effective acting on their needs than they are describing their needs.

### 2. Do all of your characters matter to the story you're telling?

Be particularly suspicious of anybody who sounds like at least one of these . . .

- ◇ Shows up for less than a page.
- ◇ Doesn't say anything.
- ◇ Has no connection to the central CONFLICT.
- ◇ Is simply a technical device. [Waiters & Waitresses who say things like, "Can I take your order?" and then are never seen or heard from again.]

Be ruthless with these hangers-on and write them out of the play. An exception: You have three or four of them who can be handled by the same performer and each is really essential.

### 3. Do all of your characters have distinct ways of speaking?

Watch for anyone who . . .

- ◇ Uses odd expressions typical of another character.
- ◇ Has the same subtext as another character.

If two characters strike the audience as being alike in the way they speak or think, both lose impact. Often, the solution is to combine these twins as a single character.

### 4. Are your characters speaking their subtext?

Subtext spoken by characters as dialogue is like sand tossed into the innards of an engine. It has the same effect. The first rule of this kind of editing: *Respect the intelligence of your audience.* Trust them. They'll get the subtext of your characters.

Likely culprits for this kind of editing . . .

- ◇ Speeches composed of several sentences. Often one sentence or phrase will be the real theatrical dialogue line. The rest will be spoken subtext.
- ◇ Lines where characters say exactly what they're thinking or feeling.
- ◇ The one exception: Spoken subtext often works well near the climax of the play or during other high points of conflict, usually near the end of a scene or act.

Questions continue on next page...

# BUFFY'S EDITING TIPS

## 5. Are your characters speaking in clichés?

Nothing closes audience ears quicker than clichés. Audiences will be irritated by dialogue that behaves as though clichés really mean something. Characters can be clichés and plots can be clichés and occasionally you can get away with these. But clichés in dialogue don't even get us anywhere. Use them and it's over.

Clichés are phrases and sentences that have become so overused that they have virtually lost all significant meaning. We know them too well. And as a result, they have no impact on us. As language, they're like grandma's old clock clacking away in the living room. After a while, you don't "hear" the ticking. The sound is there, but it's so familiar, your brain doesn't even bother to register it anymore. Here's why . . .

Your mind moves much faster than sound. So audiences flash to the end of a cliché phrase long before this awful thing has cleared the performer's teeth. And that means the audience ends up hearing these blobs twice: first as their minds complete the phrase and second, when the sound of the performer's voice reaches their ears. It's one thing to hear something really interesting twice. We'll put up with that – within limits. But to hear something really boring twice . . . that's in a class with water-torture. Or Musak.

As a gentle reminder, here's what these things look like on the page.

The words in ***italics bold face*** are what the audience leaps to long before their ears register the noise . . .

- ◇ Let's run it up ***the flagpole***.
- ◇ ... strong as ***an ox***.
- ◇ ... pretty as ***a picture***.
- ◇ ... dead as ***a door nail***.
- ◇ In for a penny, ***in for a pound***.

You can use clichés to advantage, but only under these very controlled circumstances . . .

- ◇ Make them a real vocal trait of a character. If a character continually uses clichés – and is the only one who does so – you'll quickly establish that we're dealing with an air-head.
- ◇ Twist the ends of clichés so they don't land like a marshmallow. And so what we hear is no longer a cliché, even though it starts out that way . . .

“Wow, you look like ***a million bucks***.”  
becomes...  
“Wow, you look like ***twenty-five cents***.”

# BUFFY'S EDITING TIPS

## FALSE MONOLOGUES

### A DIALOGUE CONDENSED INTO A FALSE MONOLOGUE

False Monologues are just that: At first glance, they look like short Monologues, but they're actually a series of minimally connected thoughts. These things can be a good source of dialogue when they're broken apart into individual lines. This is made easier by the odd fact that you'll often write these in pairs. The solution: interleave the lines, alternating between each of these culprits.

### False Monologue Examples

JOAN: Well, I don't know. I mean ... you know he could be anywhere. Anywhere at all. That's what these guys are like. You didn't think of that?

LARKIN: Where could he be? He can't be anywhere. He has to be some place he would've been before. That's common sense. That's what I've been thinking.

Since False Monologues are often written in pairs, you can create a much stronger run of dialogue by interweaving the lines. This is a fairly typical – but orderly example – of a solution. The lines making up these False Monologues can sometimes be used out of order and have a stronger impact that way.

### False Monologue Examples Converted Into Dialogue

LARKIN: Where could he be?  
JOAN: Well, I don't know.  
LARKIN: He can't be anywhere.  
JOAN: I mean...  
LARKIN: He has to be some place he would've been before.  
JOAN: He could be anywhere.  
LARKIN: That's common sense.  
JOAN: Anywhere at all. That's what these guys are like.  
LARKIN: That's what I've been thinking.  
JOAN: You didn't think of that?

If a False Monologue doesn't come with a twin, you can usually write new lines for the other character and interweave these between the lines of this problem-child.

# BUFFY'S EDITING TIPS

## HIDDEN MONOLOGUES A MONOLOGUE DISGUISED AS DIALOGUE

Hidden Monologues ought to be Monologues, but instead have been written so they look visually like dialogue on the page. When this happens, tension, conflicts, and forward movement, drain from the scene at a rapid rate.

### Red Flags

Red flags warning that a Hidden Monologue lurks within a section of dialogue . . .

- ◇ There's a series of dialogue lines telling a story, spoken by one character.
- ◇ The lines are fueled by internal tension, not external conflict.
- ◇ The progression of these lines develops independently of a second character who is present.
- ◇ These lines are consistently longer than those spoken by the other character.
- ◇ And the other character punctuates these story lines with something like . . .

- ◇ Uh, huh.
- ◇ And then what did he say?
- ◇ What did you do then?
- ◇ That's amazing!
- ◇ Really?
- ◇ I never knew that.

You can bring the monologue to life by cutting those "Uh, huh" sort of lines and the brief – and insignificant – responses to them.

You probably wrote these things to give your fingers something to do while you were puzzling out the next movement of the monologue. And when you were done, didn't realize what you'd accomplished – a monologue hidden within a dialogue.



# PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY

OF

## TERMS & CONCEPTS

- Action:** The working of one force or character upon another.
- Beat:** A section of dialogue that contains one idea, one objective or a single motivating force for a character. A beat is a unit of action. (Think of the story as a stick shift on a car: every time the story switches gears, this is a new beat.)
- Climax:** The culminating event in a series of events which have led causally to this moment; often the moment of greatest physical or emotional violence.
- Conflict:** A struggle between opposing principles or aims.
- Dialogue:** The lines spoken by two or more characters in a scene.
- Event:** A happening that changes the relationships between characters or between characters and their environment. Events have a cause and/or an effect.
- Exposition:** Descriptive or explanatory writing regarding an event, a character or a place.
- Imagery:** A structure of mental pictures used in expressing persuasive or evocative thoughts or feelings.
- Milieu:** The atmosphere and environment surrounding any specific setting.
- Monologue:** "One Voice"; a speech given by a single actor in a play.
- Motif:** A feature or theme, especially one dominant or recurring in a work of art, music or drama.
- Objective:** A character's aim or goal.
- Plot:** The complete dramatic action described in the script; a sequence of events that have a definite beginning, middle and end.
- Resolution:** When the conflict between characters or ideas reaches a conclusion.
- Reversal:** When a character's motivations and/or actions shift to their opposite. *Example:* The hunter becomes the hunted. The liar ends up telling the truth, etc.
- Rhythm:** The time pattern of speech and movement produced by the interaction between characters.
- Stage directions:** The part of the play that describes non-verbal actions of the characters.
- Subtext:** Meaning and motivation of characters hidden beneath the dialogue.
- Suspense:** The delay or withholding of revelations by characters designed to increase the audience's curiosity and interest.
- Unit:** A section of dialogue that contains one idea or motivating force for the play.

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