BUILD-A-PLAY
DRAMATIC ACTION

You have created your play’s CHARACTERS and SETTING. You have written the WHO and WHERE of your story. Now, it’s time to CREATE YOUR STORY.

Sometimes we call the telling of your story the PLOT or how the events in your story happen. When writing a play, I like to think of my story as DRAMATIC ACTION. Most of us think this is like an action movie—a car chase or maybe fighting aliens with lasers. But, that is not what I’m talking about. What I am talking about is this -

**DRAMATIC ACTION IS:** *Something happens that makes something else happen.*

You can think of it as cause and effect. Something happens at the beginning of your story that kicks off an event that kicks off another event that kicks off another and so on until the last event concludes your story.

Each event is a scene in your play. Each scene kicks off the next scene, until the play concludes with the last scene. It is this kicking off of events that we want to outline today – SCENE BY SCENE until the END SCENE.

**STUDY THE OUTLINE:**
To help us understand Dramatic Action, look at the next page to see what a DRAMATIC ACTION OUTLINE would look like for a play of – *The Three Little Pigs.*

I don’t use this fairy tale because I think you’re into fairy tales. I use it because it is a story that most people at least kind of know. It also has perfect dramatic action and is one of the most adapted stories in the English language.
DRAMATIC ACTION OUTLINE EXAMPLE
THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

SCENE ONE: Mama Pig tells the Three Little Pigs it is time for them to leave home and make it out in the BIG BAD WORLD (BBW) & warns them to beware of the BIG BAD WOLF (BBW) (Yes, both are BBW – it’s a metaphor!)

Because they have to leave home Scene Two happens.

SCENE TWO: Because they left home, the Three Little Pigs need to build new homes. Pig One builds out of straw, Pig Two out of sticks and Pig Three out of bricks. While building they are secretly watched by the BBW, who is hungry and see the Pigs as DINNER.

Because BBW is hungry and the Three Little Pigs look like dinner Scene Three happens.

SCENE THREE: Because the BBW is hungry he goes to the Pig One’s house and blows it down. But, Pig One escapes to Pig Two’s house. BBW is still hungry.

Because the Pig got away and BBW is still hungry Scene Four happens.

SCENE FOUR: Because BBW is hungry he goes to Pig Two’s house and blows it down. But, both Pig One and Pig Two escape to Pig Three’s brick house.

Because the Pigs got away BBW is still hungry Scene Five happens.

SCENE FIVE: Because he’s still hungry BBW tries to blow down Pig Three’s brick house. But, FAILS!

Because BBW fails, Scene Six happens.

SCENE SIX: Because BBW needs a new tactic to get to the Three Little Pigs in the brick house. He decides to climb down the chimney, but the Three Pigs are ready for him and into the boiling water BBW goes. Three Pigs make BBW Stew.

Because the Three Pigs defeat the BBW, Scene Seven happens.

SCENE SEVEN: Because the Three Little Pigs defeated BBW they celebrate their new life in the brick house surviving in the Big Bad World (BBW) END OF PLAY.
YOUR DRAMATIC ACTION OUTLINE

1) **THE DRAMATIC QUESTION**

Before writing your outline, **WRITE a DRAMATIC QUESTION for your story.**

A DRAMATIC QUESTION is a question that is raised in the FIRST SCENE (Beginning) of your story and is not answered until the LAST SCENE (End) of your story. It is the question that the audience carries with them throughout the whole play. It is a WHAT WILL HAPPEN question for the WHOLE PLAY.

**FOR EXAMPLE:** In the Three Little Pigs the DRAMATIC QUESTION is:

*Will the Three Little Pigs survive in the Big Bad World?*

This question is raised in the first scene when Mama Pig tells the Three Pigs to leave home and make it on their own. Will they be able to survive in the Big Bad World? The whole play happens around this question, then in the FINAL scene it is answered YES. They have defeated the BBW and celebrate surviving in the Big Bad World.

**WRITE YOUR DRAMATIC QUESTION:**

2) **WRITE YOUR PLAY’S DRAMATIC ACTION OUTLINE**

After writing your dramatic question, write your DRAMATIC ACTION OUTLINE. Don’t lose this outline. You will continue use it to write your whole play.

**REMEMBER:**

- You have only THREE different places that your story can take place in.
- You have only THREE main characters. If you need to add a few other characters to help support your three main characters, you may add them. But, limit the number of characters to no more than seven (including the THREE you have already created.)
- Limit your story to no more than SEVEN SCENES.
- Your FIRST SCENE must raise your DRAMATIC QUESTION.
- Your LAST SCENE must answer your DRAMATIC QUESTION.
- Don’t get into too much description in your outline. Just write WHAT HAPPENS in each SCENE that kicks off the next SCENE.

Write your outline on a piece of paper or type it up on a tablet or computer.

**NEXT TIME:** We will LEARN HOW TO WRITE DIALOGUE AND will WRITE the FIRST SCENE of YOUR PLAY.