

Lesson 3: Play Writing

Grade 7 English Language Arts

LESSON DESCRIPTION: Students will work in teams of 3 to 5 to write short plays about connecting with the natural world using a collaborative script writing technique. These plays can be performed within the class or as part of the opening ceremony for the 10 Day Screen-Free Challenge. They could also be performed for younger students.

FOCUS QUESTIONS: How can information be conveyed using playwriting? What is a method for quickly writing a play?

OBJECTIVES: – Students will:

- write a cohesive play based on information they have learned and personal experience about connecting with the natural world.
- set a purpose, consider audience and develop focused ideas in writing their play.
- exhibit personal style, voice and design to enhance the informational content.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**
 - * **CCSS.7.W.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
 - b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
 - c. Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.
 - * **CCSS.7.L.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing speaking, reading or listening.
 - a. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.

LENGTH OF LESSON:

Two lessons lasting 50 minutes. Performing the play before an audience will add to the length of the lessons.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Writing notepad, one per student with name at the top
- Chalkboard or chart paper for the teacher to write down their ideas.
- Story Map graphic organizer, one per team of three to five students.

VOCABULARY:

dialogue

script

collaborative

PROCEDURES

Activity 1: Anticipatory Set – Provide background information on plays

1. Explain to students they're going to write a play about what they have learned.

Ask students: What makes a good play?

Write down their ideas on the chalkboard.

Activity 2: Brainstorm ideas related to set, characters and dialogue.

1. Explain to students that they will first write a scene, which is like a chapter in a book, using a collaborative writing process. Gerald Chapman who first developed this technique said that writing a play is like driving a car at night. The headlights show what is just in front and to the side of the car but you can't see very far ahead. This play will develop as we go and we can't always see very far ahead but that's OK.
2. This is a whole class activity with students brainstorming ideas. The teacher writes down their ideas and then the class makes their final selection by voting. Each student gets to vote three times.

Ask students: Where do you want your first scene to take place? This is called the setting.

Encourage students to be specific. If someone says a town, ask where in the town, if they say a house, ask where in the house.

Teacher's Note: It's important to give students enough time to brainstorm ideas. Some groups may need longer than others. Write down all ideas. These ideas will also be useful when they want to expand their play.

3. **Ask students:** Who do you want to be in this scene? These are the characters in the play. Brainstorm a name and description, eg. Tom, a middle-age farmer.

Have students brainstorm three characters to include in the scene. Suggest that one of the characters be a boy or girl their age. Have students vote and keep the top three.

Teacher's Note: Students often want to begin writing a play with lots of characters. However, the dialogue will be much more interesting if they begin with only three characters. Tell the students that they can add more characters later.

4. **Tell students:** We're going to begin writing what our character will say in our play which is called dialogue. Plays use dialogue to tell the story. This is the format used.

Write the following sample dialogue on the chalkboard.

Sue: Where are you going?

Mary: I'm looking for my brother.

5. **Tell the students:** Write the character's name on the left followed by a colon and then write what the character says. Do not use quotation marks. Then skip a line and write the next character's name with a colon and so on.

Have the students brainstorm possible first lines and then vote on their favorite line. Each student can vote three times.

Tell students: We're going to begin with the same line of dialogue. What should this line be and who should say the first line?

Teacher's Note: It's especially important to give students enough time to brainstorm ideas for a first line. Often the first suggestions will be very short. However, once the students hear a good line it will stimulate higher quality dialogue. Write down all ideas. These sample lines will also be useful when all students begin writing dialogue.

Activity 3: Group writing as a whole class activity

1. Have students sit in a circle with a writing notepad. Their name should be on the top.

Tell students: Write the first line that the class selected on the top of the page using the format we learned. Then skip a line and pick one of the other characters and write a line of dialogue that he or she might say as a reply.

Give the students sixty seconds to write their second line. Signal the end of the sixty seconds and have the students hand their paper to the person sitting next to them in a clockwise rotation.

2. **Tell students:** Read what has been written and then add a new line of dialogue with a different character. You'll have sixty seconds again to write.

Continue for ten minutes having the students read and write a new line. At the end of the ten minutes each student will have an entire page of dialogue.

Activity 4: Reading scripts

1. **Tell Students:** We now have over twenty different scripts. Read the one you have and raise your hand if you think it is a good script.
2. Have one of the student volunteers come up to the front or inside the circle and select two other students to help read the script. Have each student take one of the three characters and read their lines. Have several other scripts read aloud in front of the class.

Teacher's Note: It's very important to have students read these as a play in front of others. Students really enjoy this and are proud that they have written the start of a play.

Activity 5: Students write their own individual script

1. **Tell Students:** Now you are going to write your own script. You should decide the setting and characters. However, limit your characters to no more than four. You may also use any of the ideas that the class brainstormed.
2. Give the students ten minutes to write their own scripts. If there is time let the students read their scripts in front of the class.

Activity 6: Students teams write mini-plays

1. Have students work in groups of three to five. Give each team the Story Map graphic organizer. Have each team identify a problem related to children and adults not connecting to the natural world. They should write the problem in the center. Then have them identify a setting and three to five characters for their play based on the size of their group. They should come up with a solution to the problem and write this on their Story Map.
2. **Tell students:** Think of the events as the action in the play that will lead to a solution. Each event may also end up being a different scene with a different setting. Brainstorm 3 to 5 events and write them on the story map.
3. After a team has completed the Story Map they can begin writing the script. They should first list the characters and describe the setting. The team can then use different approaches to write. One method is to have each person on the team become one of the characters. The team should brainstorm a first line and then write the rest of the play collaboratively. Each person will contribute lines that their character would say. Another method is to have each person write the script for one of the events. Because of the experience the students have already had writing scripts this goes very well.
4. Have student teams read / act out their plays for the rest of the class.

STORY MAP

Title: _____

Setting:

Characters: _____

Problem:

Event 1 _____

Event 2 _____

Event 3 _____

Event 4 _____

Solution: