



## A Playwriting Project for 8th Grade Theatre Students

Curriculum Unit 93.03.08

by Jeff Farrell

### INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

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My curriculum unit focuses on playwriting techniques for advanced 8th grade students. To devise a practical unit that responds to student needs, I plan the unit's activities with both the individual and the whole class in mind. According to Richard Courtney's "The Dramatic Curriculum," my assumptions are holistic: I see student development in terms of total organic growth rather than strictly in terms of training, natural expression, or change. I believe holistic assumptions are necessary when students see school as a condition forced upon them and as a place for social interaction. For these students, school is not truly a place to learn.

My unit has several intrinsic goals. On an individual basis I aim to promote each student's active participation, decisions, role-play, growth, and success. On a group basis, I aim to promote a sense of ensemble which allows for individuals to try on various roles. I plan to achieve this through a prepared class structure that outlines specific limits, consequences, objectives and rewards. In addition, I hope to guide but not dictate group behavior in improvisational exercises that develop their natural sense of ensemble and group play. I want them to have fun and to use imagination. Fundamental to these goals, a safe environment allows students to feel secure enough to play.

My unit's activities play on the tensions between the personal and the social using both realism and fantasy. The unit has two, related, extrinsic goals. One is for each student to write a play (long or short) to submit to the Yale Children's Dramat Contest in January. Through various exercises I will encourage the individuals' plays to explore imagination. The second extrinsic goal is that students together may take turns in constructing a play based on the recent autobiography—"The Diary of Latoya Hunter, My First Year in Junior High" (New York: Crown, 1992).

The unit provides a guide for 20 weeks of class activity, from first meeting in September until the end of January. I prepare this unit for middle school classroom conditions distinguished by: 1) inconsistent and inadequate class time, 2) peer pressure, 3) apathy, 4) issues of justice (injustice) and equality (racism), and 5) problem discipline. By recognizing the given conditions, I seek to lay the groundwork for successful classroom experience for both students and teachers alike.

## PREPARATION AND STRATEGY

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Teachers more experienced than I in middle-school education may find the following section to be of limited help. However, for my work with this age group, the following is at least as important as the lesson plans themselves. The section addresses my specific needs.

Preparation and strategy are the groundwork of successful classroom experience. A theatre class is no different. What is distinctive about theatre is that it uses the student's own body, voice, ideas, and emotions. Furthermore, theatre classes may allow unusual freedom—potentially the freedom to express daily life through presented and represented action. Thus, preparation and strategy must address two major concerns: 1) the cycle of peer pressure and apathy present in students, and 2) the effective management of the greater freedoms present in theatre classes.

To address these two main concerns, I submit the following strategies and resources.

### **Extra Class Time**

If I can judge by last year's experience, my elective Theatre class will consist of between eight and eighteen students. The class will meet twice each week. More class time would provide greater continuity and promote greater success. If I doctor the schedules of those students in my elective class, it is possible to add one more class meeting each week.

That is, our school policy requires all 8th grade students take a Theatre class. Those required classes meet once each week. In addition to the required class, students may elect to take a Theatre class that is more advanced. Thus, a student who chooses Theatre as an elective meets once in his/her required class, plus two more times. My desire is to make sure that students in my elective class all take their required class at the same time. By arranging to meet as a group once more every week, I will gain up to ten more class meetings per marking period. Not only does the increased frequency promote continuity, but I expect to positively affect student apathy and discipline. When group dynamics are extremely important, then meeting once more each week gives me 50% more time to work with them.

### **Classrooms**

Rather than starting the year in the theatre classroom, I plan to meet my elective class in a room with desks and chairs. I prefer to spend the first three or four weeks of the year in a "regular" classroom in order to introduce the freedoms of theatre class gradually. As a teacher I will be better able to focus on the students and material rather than having to deal with distractions due to the setting. Furthermore, in this setting I wish to prepare students for successful use of the theatre classroom.

### **Contract**

One method of preparation is to require each student to read and sign the following contract. In addition, I will require that each student have a parent or guardian sign the contract which will be returned to me. In fact, before moving into the theatre space, a student must return the signed contract. I hope this will initiate student responsibility and link it to the ritual process of moving into a new space. This is a first step toward the student's sense of ensemble and parental involvement. See below.

Student violations of the following contract will result in detention, progress report to parents, and, if

necessary, failing grades and further action. I base grades on each student's ability to fulfill this contract. Attitude, behavior, and participation is 75% of your grade. The remaining 25% is the quality of your work. I give extra credit and take overall improvement into account. Also, see my end of the contract below.

In Mr. FARRELL's theatre class

- 1) I agree to try my best every time we meet.
- 2) I agree to respect others as they are to respect me. I agree to no lewd comments, dissing, excessive teasing or general rudeness to students or teachers.
- 3) I agree not to disrupt class or cause distraction because I want to learn, and I respect the rights of others to learn.
- 4) I agree to come prepared to class with my homework.
- 5) I agree to participate. Over the year this means keeping a "me-journal," acting, and writing a short play.
- 6) I agree to cooperate and to follow instructions.
- 7) I agree to open my attitude inside the theatre classroom.
- 8) I want to explore the imagination.
- 9) I want to have fun, play, and work hard.
- 10) I want to see plays on field trips with my classmates and agree to be on my best behavior.
- 11) When I make a mistake in attitude, or action, I agree to correct it as soon as possible.

AS \_\_\_\_\_'s parent/guardian, I agree to be sure

\_\_\_\_\_ lives up to this contract.

Student's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or guardian's signature \_\_\_\_\_

daytime phone \_\_\_\_\_ evening phone \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

In our classroom, I, Mr. Farrell

- 1) I agree to give my best to each student.
- 2) I agree to treat each person as an individual and to be as fair as possible.
- 3) I hope to guide students' imaginations and to help them represent their world using Theatre.
- 4) When I make a mistake, I agree to correct it as soon as possible.
- 5) I agree to have high expectations because I want my students to grow and to learn and to feel strong.

signed \_\_\_\_\_

I plan to distribute copies to the students, and, as their first assignment ask for them to be returned with appropriate signatures. I will make an extra copy—one for my file marking contact with the home, and one for each student to keep in the front of his/her notebook.

### **Rewards**

In addition to the previous preparation measures, I will maintain a reward system in my record book. Individuals and the class as a whole may receive bonus points. They receive points for their timely entrance, for all having their assignment, etc. I will make it a point to connect points with desired behavior, to award points for correct daily use of vocabulary words, to go on theatre field trips, and also, to consider a party to celebrate completion of their plays.

### **Supplies and Materials**

I will maintain a supply of paper, pencils, erasers, and notebooks for students to purchase from me. In addition, students will need: 1) a box of hats, scarves, vests, and costume pieces; 2) a box of simple percussion and musical instruments; 3) a box of handprops; 4) a large roll of paper; 5) materials for mask-making; 6) general books of photographs—primarily photos of people. See the bibliography for specific books or scripts.

### **Syllabus**

The final preparation strategy is the syllabus and schedule which I will give students. The remaining strategy comes under the heading of Activities and Lesson Plans.

### **ACTIVITIES and LESSON PLANS**

I have divided the 20 week period into four sections—Introduction, Starting Points, Development, and Completion. The period of Introduction acquaints students with me, the space, my expectations, their classmates, and the Theatre realm. Fundamental to this section is developing a positive learning environment for students. A positive learning environment means a space and conditions in which students feel safe. If students are concerned about comments from peers, then they turn off and retreat into silence and apathy. If students persist, aggressive acts of frustration and anger can erupt. Further, to the degree a student fears failure in the eyes of him—or herself, peers, teachers, parents, then the greater the student apathy becomes. This apathy takes the form of “dumbing down”—a passive-aggressive response that pretends to be less

intelligent, talented, skilled, aware, etc. than a student truly is. Indeed, “dumbing down” also has racial undertones, for to perform at high levels of achievement and to actively participate is to validate the power structure of the status quo which has been white. Often black students deride other black students who perform well—for “acting white.” I have heard specific comments in my classes, but more often, this “anti-assimilationist” attitude of willful ignorance is an unspoken undercurrent of the classroom experience. These attitudes can gut a class that depends upon participation and personal risk. Thus, to develop a positive learning environment is absolutely vital.

Yet, a teacher cannot simply establish a safe place by fiat, especially when the culture outside the classroom contradicts those aims. To create a safe place takes time. Toward this end, I need to provide a classroom that resembles other classrooms, so students will “know how to behave.” But because the object of my class is for students to engage in creative play using Theatre disciplines, I must provide students with a kind of structured freedom. The balance of discipline/freedom is the line I walk as a Theatre teacher.

### Disciplined Activity and Cognitive Learning

In each of the four sections (Introduction, Starting Points, Development, Completion) I will initiate activity with familiar and structured activities that emphasize “boring” lessons. Like other classes, I expect my students to keep up to date with our class work. Each student will keep a notebook. In it, a student will place our contract, the syllabus, vocabulary words, assignments (including “me” pages), and handouts. Except for “me” page journal entries, their notebooks should resemble notebooks from a science class. Their notebooks record the extrinsic signs of our class. Students must arrange materials and entries in a dated, chronological order. As an example of material for the notebook, I submit the following list of vocabulary words.

Audience etiquette	Director	Playwright
Style	Community	Concentration
Form	Imagination	Pantomime
Classicism	Tableau	Improvisation
Romanticism	Playing areas	Set
Cooperation	Up/Downstage	Scene
Realism	Discipline	Character
Stage Manager	Script/Notation	Actor
Scene	Act	Floor Plan
Given Circumstances	Point of Attack	Synopsis
Naturalism	Scenario	Exposition
Symbolism	Dialogue	Conflict
Expressionism	Plot	Goal/Objective
Epic Theatre	Climax	Denouement
Absurdism	Resolution	Diaphragm
Kabuki	Projection	Articulation
Noh	Phrasing	Pitch/Tone
Prologue	Comedy	Blocking
Multi-media	Tragedy	Choreography
Mixed forms	Thrust/Proscenium, etc.	Cue
Renaissance	Medieval	Elizabethan

Restoration	Melodrama	Monologue
Farce	Modernism	Action

A typical lesson plan for the Introduction section would include having students write out definitions of the words above. The activity is familiar to them. Let them hate it. That's ok. As we gain a common vocabulary for classroom use, they'll impress themselves with their knowledge. As a supplement to the vocabulary, I will introduce practical information regarding Theatre. This information will cover "stage types," "theme," "scenario," "actor/character," "objective," "given circumstance/exposition." Between three and six weeks into the school year, we should make the transition into the Theatre classroom. In this transition period I will introduce "Antigone" for students to read.

Creative Activity and Remembering How to Play In addition to the familiar type of classroom activity, I wish to introduce the element of freedom to our class. This is the heart of my curriculum's purpose. The freedom consists of the creative expression and interaction of students as they present and represent their lives and imaginations. Here is the activity that does not focus on the student's Theatre technique or cognitive learning or extrinsic goal, but instead focuses on total organic growth and fun. These activities will consist of interpersonal games and Theatre games. Initially, any game—even whiffleball or kickball—that holds student interest is valuable for establishing a safe, creative environment. For, in play, the students become themselves most completely. They learn fundamental rules and how individuals interact within a game environment. Games may include tag, freeze tag, freeze statues, freeze variations, blind man's bluff, gossip, musical chairs (use their music), mirror game and mirror variations, mime ball throwing and tug-o-war. These are games for the Introduction section although at times during the year it may be wise to go back to them.

Related to the games and opening the students to freedom through their interaction is a structured discussion. Frequently students go to classes with the same faces for years and nonetheless know very little about their fellow students. In addition, kids of this age sometimes feel locked into a particular "mask" of behavior and personality, when in truth, the individual has outgrown or wishes to outgrow those limitations. To address these issues I plan to use lessons based on Robert Biral's curriculum unit (1980) using drama to break boundaries. In it he proposes a structured discussion based on 74 questions. The questions he has gathered serve to dispel prejudgments. In addition, the questions stimulate the formation of values. Here are some examples:

Who is the person most relevant to our times?

What is the best movie you have ever seen?

What is the title of the last book you read?

When you think of "reality," what comes to mind first?

What is the ugliest thing you know?

What is the most beautiful thing about people?

Both the questions and the discussion serve to open the students to creative expression, especially in the development of plays which will occur over the next 16 weeks or so. Indeed, some questions are sure to inspire scenarios for improvisation.

In the Introductory Period I have divided my activities into categories of either the Cognitive or the Creative.

These two categories will serve me throughout the remainder of the course. I see the two categories as a type of stimulus and response. In the Introductory Period I wish establish each type of activity, then to bridge the activities by introducing the idea of “theme” and by giving students practical information regarding stage types. The fun-damental theme of our unit is the Individual vs. Society. Sup-plementing the major theme, I propose secondary themes of Failure/Success, Reality/Fantasy, Confidence/ Hopelessness, Desire-Wish-Value-Attitude. I will introduce these themes in questions for discussion and connect them to our reading of “Antigone”. Regarding stage types, I will give them information about proscenium, thrust, arena, corner thrust and other forms of the stage. Then, when we move into the Theatre classroom we will construct makeshift forms of these stages from chairs, platforms, boxes, and cloth.

## Sample Lesson Plan Outline

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### (Intro Period)

Objective: to have students gain a sense of themselves and of how others see them in a positive light.

Introduction: Circle Name Game. Students stand in a circle. Each student says his/her name and makes a motion of something they like to do. They are to shout out. Example: Jenny! Double Dutch! As each student takes a turn, that student shouts his/her own name, performs his/her action, repeats all the previous names and actions, and repeats his/her own name and action again. Emphasize projection and physical commitment to the actions.

Cognitive Activity: Distribute handouts with 12 -15 vocabulary words. Have students write out definitions as I give them. Place vocabulary words in their notebooks.

Creative Activity: Students take turns lying down on an unwrapped roll of paper. One at a time they have their silhouettes traced. Each student decorates the image and cuts it out. We pin the silhouettes against the wall. Students then take turns to write positive comments regarding the person on each image. Take a Polaroid snapshot of each person’s completed image. This snapshot goes into their notebooks.

Evaluation: Monitor for individual participation and constructive behavior. Reward constructive behavior with both praise and dots. Connect the rewards and punishments with specific behavior.

Closure: Review, propose subject for next class period, assign homework as necessary.

As we complete the Introductory Period, we will move into the Theatre classroom and begin the Period of Starting Points. I put will establish a single exercise for students to enter class and begin every day without direction by me. I have observed this method as a means of consistency for students to begin class. They know to their books down and then to join in without speaking. I may have them Build a Machine or perform a

Group Mirror variation. Classes will continue in the format described above. The cognitive activities will move away from vocabulary and toward understanding “Antigone” in terms of our themes. I will draw on numerous Theatre games described below to serve as the creative activities. Some of these activities carry over into Periods of Development and Completion.

A list of some activities and games:

1. Build a Machine. A fellow Theatre teacher uses this activity to start every class. Students are to come in and automatically go to it. This gives the teacher time to take roll even as students enter in a consistent and orderly way.
2. Freeze, and Freeze Variations Students move through the space, then freeze into statues when the teacher claps and yells, “Freeze!” Variations include moving in particular ways, or in particular character types, or with particular emotional content.
3. Mirror, Mirror Variations, including group mirror. See Spolin.
4. A circle chant game, the leader stands inside the group’s circle

Leader:	Group
(moves to rhythm)	
“Shay shay koo lay!”	(repeats leader’s words and motions)
“Shay ko fee shah!”	
“Ko fee shah lala!”	
“Ala kee lala!”	
“Shay! ah-yende!”	
“Shay! ah-yende!”	

(Leader closes eyes, extends arm and points. As the leader counts, the leader spins around. Whoever he/she points at on the count of ten becomes the new leader.)

Leader:	Group:
“one!”	“two!”
“three!”	“four!”
“five!”	“six!”
“seven!”	“eight!”
“nine!”	

(All shout “ten!”)

5. Psychiatrist The group sits in a circle and sends one person outside the room. The group decides upon a specific attitude, action, or response. The psychiatrist re-enters and asks questions to each person, trying to guess the pre-arranged response. (Tricks: ask the same question to several people, ask simple questions, ask questions to which you already know the answer.)



6. Blindfold trust walk The group divides into paired partners. One partner ties a blindfold around the other partner. The teacher leads the group in a guided walk. (backwards, skipping, running, etc.)
7. Circle trust/fall Having previously agreed to single out one person on the circle, the group stands in an enclosed circle. Another person stands blindfolded in the middle. The person in the middle gets spun around. By all concentrating together, the group tries to make the blindfolded person fall toward the person chosen on the circle. This is a kind of an ESP party game that is fun.
8. Labyrinth/variations Class divides into partners. One set of partners devise a labyrinth in the classroom out of chairs, obstacles, and bolts of fabric. Then, the those who devised the maze lead their blindfolded partners through the maze. After one group completes the labyrinth walk, then they switch. The original group takes on the blindfolds while the second group re-arranges the maze.

Individuals of the second group then lead their blindfolded partners through the new maze. This is an excellent game to stimulate ensemble and trust, as well as to stimulate the kinesthetic imagination. Individuals emerge with an activated sense of stage space, and often characters or designs for sets. This is beneficial to the actor as well as to the playwright.

9. Pet Peeve rant/variations Students take fast turns ranting about pet peeves they have. Prepare by making a list of several possible pet peeves.
10. Seven changes/variations Students choose a partner, face and observe each other. They turn about, make up to seven changes in their personal appearance. On a signal, all turn around again to face their partners. Take turns guessing the changes.
11. Improv from 3 bags (character, setting, problem or conflict) Students develop short, improbable scenes based on the chance selection of Character, Setting, Problem written on a piece of paper and drawn from each of three marked bags.
12. Dream Option This is an improv game for up to five players. One person interviews a member of the audience, about what that person did that day, or the previous day. The interviewer tries to be thorough and pick up on details. After the interview, the group replays the interviewee's day as a dream sequence.
13. Story Circle/ story by beads The group sits in a circle. Each person adds one word to the story as it grows. The group establishes a rhythm so that the pace of the unfolding story is continuous. Whenever anyone gets stuck for a word, they are to re-insert a key word that has already been used. If the story-circle is a kind of necklace, then these key words are "beads." This makes for cohesive and absurd stories.
14. Complete Centering/ alignment This is less of a game and more of an exercise for the actor. Based in body alignment discipline that informs stage movement, breath, and voice, these exercises relax the body and give confidence to the actor. The student must focus attention. My methods of centering draw on several disciplines that include yoga, the work of Jerzy Grotowski, and Kristin Linklater.

A simplified account has the student find a relaxed and balanced standing position, then make it conscious. How are they standing? What part of the feet have weight? Where is the hip balanced? How is the back? The chest? The head? Have students roll down their spines one vertebra at a time, then re-stack themselves. Students identify balance physically. Then they identify balance regarding breath, internal dialogue, and time. To describe this process requires quite a bit of development not appropriate to this space. But for further reference see Grotowski's and Linklater's books listed in the bibliography.

15. Zip Zap Zup This is a game of elimination with two winners. The group stands in a circle with

hands clasped and index fingers pointing like a gun. One person initiates the game by pointing his/her fingers at a person and saying, "ZIP!" The person must point directly and make eye contact. Sloppy shooting is grounds for being tossed out of the circle. The person who received the "Zip" points his/her own fingers at another person and says, "ZAP!" That third person then passes the charge along to someone else by saying, "ZUP!" Breaking the rhythm or in any way not being clear with a single zip, zap, or zup causes the person to be out of the game.

16. Pantomime tools The basis for pantomime is in muscular tension and relaxation. I will demonstrate various forms for facial masks based on tension/relaxation, as well as demonstrating body movements that imitate actions such as pulling a rope, climbing a ladder, walking (without moving), holding a glass of water, throwing a ball, carrying a heavy suitcase.

17. Three balls and a glass of water. This is a fun game that is a metaphor for the actor's stage experience. First the group stands outside or in a large open space. Each person counts off, but not in any regular pattern around the circle. "One" should not stand next to "two" who should not stand next to "three," etc. The first objective is for the group to pass one ball in ascending sequence. Don't drop it!

When the group masters one ball in ascending sequence, then stop. Introduce a second ball to pass in descending sequence. If you drop the ball, start over! Once the group masters the descending sequence, then add both balls together—ascending and descending. This is tricky. Once the group masters two balls, the third step is add a ball which is passed along the outside of the circle, so it goes around as the other two balls go in sequence. Lots of ACTION! The final step is to add a glass of water to be passed along the outside of the circle in the opposite direction to ball #3. Don't spill the water or drop the balls! Watch out! Great game for concentration and ensemble building. This may also be played with a hat instead of a glass of water.

18. Sound/movement transformations. Described by Spolin, this game involves students standing opposite one another. One person finds a motion and an accompanying sound, then moves toward the person opposite. That person mirrors the sound and motion and steps out to meet the originator. The second person fully claims the first person's sound and motion. The first person rejoins the line opposite where he started. Meanwhile, the second person allows the sound and motion to transform into a new sound and motion. This game passes from one person to the next until everyone has had a turn.

19. Handprop transformations. This is a fast game that requires respect for the handprops involved so that they are not damaged. The game is fun and fast and requires mind-popping imagination. As is the case with many of these games, they work better if you don't think, but simply jump in and be silly, allowing your subconscious to work. The group stands in a circle. In the center of the circle is a collection of handprops and toys and objects that suggest many possible uses. Rugged percussion instruments are good for this game also. At the word "GO!" students take turns. They run into the center, take a prop and make a short scene consisting of one line. The person is to use the prop in a way that it was not originally intended. The person transforms the prop into some other object. Thus, a telephone may become a banana, an oar, a bow tie, a belt buckle, an ear, a nose, sunglasses, a baseball bat, etc. Each person must take at least four turns and the action must be fast but not jumbled up on top of each other. This is an ancient clown game.

20. Charades. Everyone knows how to play charades. One hint, however, is that you have strips of paper with suggestions already written down.

21. Entrances/Exits Students are to demonstrate a character's entrance and exit, entering from stage right and exiting stage left. Each entrance must designate from where the character is

coming. Each exit must demonstrate where the character is going. This is a game that pertains directly to writing scenes because the simple boundaries of entrance and exit define a fundamental dramatic action.

22. Filling the space. This is a Spolin exercise described in both books. It involves the entire group moving around the room, not making contact, but rather giving attention to the space. This is a great exercise for allowing the body to come alive in space. See Spolin's description in either book listed in the bibliography.

23. Apology. Two students stand back to back. Each student has a telephone. They may be mimed. One student makes a call to the other and apologizes for something they have done. The more outrageous the better.

24. Moving a dream/ walking a trip / making a wish. Students spread out and find the most comfortable position to lie down or sit. Students are instructed to relax and close their eyes. They can travel to a place they like very much. Have them picture in mind the actual trip they would take if they were to leave the classroom and go to their favorite place. Which direction would they go? What would they see as they passed by on the way? What would they do as they went along? Who would they meet along the way? And, after they arrive—Who is there in that special place? What is there? What is one wish you would give that person who is there? Or one wish you would make for the place itself? After students complete the mental imagery, instruct each student to not speak to classmates, and practice acting out the stages of their journey. Move through the space without interacting. Focus only on acting out the journey, the arrival, and the wish. Find motions for the journey, the arrival, interactions within the dream, and the wish. This can take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. When students have practiced their dream walk, then each takes turns showing them to the class.

25. Instruct students to think of a character who wants something terribly. The character would be willing to do almost anything to get the object of their desire. Perform the same exercise as above except this time acting out the character and objective.

26. The assignment is to bring in an unusual photograph of a person. Students place photos in a bag and draw them out. Each person has a photo. Take the photo and write the words the person is saying. What does the character feel? How does the character move? What does the character want? How much does the character want it? Where is the character going? To whom is the character talking? Who are the character's friends? family? enemies? What does the character like to eat? Do for fun? What is the character afraid of? Who or what does the character love? For what would that character give his/her life? Where is that character? WRITE these down. ACT them out.

27. Take a hat out of the hat box and play with it. Do not interact with other students. Become a kind of character. Feel what that character feels. Imagine having the thoughts of that character. Find motions and actions to go with the character. Same questions as above. Write down your character's thoughts, actions and reactions, plus any dialogue spoken to another character. If a companion character is present too, then write that down also.

28. Each person moves to a separate space on the floor. Get comfortable. Close your eyes. Imagine a moment from your life that has been most joyful or most painful. Imagine the events that preceded that moment. Imagine how your body moved in those events. Allow your body to move again through those moments. Keep your eyes closed and move in a way most comfortable to you in reproducing that time. Allow your body's movements to reproduce that time. The movements may be realistic or they may be the expression of how you felt on the inside. Move according to how your body feels. Come to a conclusion. Get a partner. One partner sit and

watch, the other repeat the motions just discovered. When finished, switch places. The partner who watched now re-creates the motions of the first partner. The first partner watches the re-creation of his/her movements. Repeat with the second partner. Discussion.

29. Write out scenarios—two characters, their objectives, a place, a conflict or problem. Allow the characters objectives to lead them through the scene. Exchange scenarios. Partners act them out.

30. Listen to music to create a sense of place. Write out a description that includes a character's entrance and exit.

The above games/exercises are some of the means used to develop the student's sense of theatrical space and to stimulate imagination, confidence, and organic growth. Furthermore, the games allow and promote the

student's ability to play with various roles. All the activities start or develop the playwriting process. Note that we will make use of costume pieces, hats, handprops and other materials listed above in Preparation and Strategy. The following lesson plans are from the Period of Starting Points, but I can also derive lessons of the third and fourth periods from the activities listed above.

## Sample Lesson Plan Outline

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### (from Period of Starting Points)

Objective: To have students find inspiration for their plays, to apply skills acquired thus far, to acquire further creative confidence.

Intro: Build a Machine—an activity devised by Viola Spolin.

Cognitive Activity: Continue work on Antigone as possible.

Creative Activity: Construct a stage based on stage types discussed previously. Students first construct a maze or labyrinth from materials within the Theatre classroom—chairs, painted flats, furniture cubes, pieces of cloth. Half the class participates in the construction of the maze.

Meanwhile, the second half of class sits with backs to the construction. When completed, the first group of students blindfolds the the second group and leads them through the maze. Then, the groups reverse. This activity leads directly into construction of stage types, kinesthetic understanding of space, and all creative theatre work including writing.

Evaluation: Monitor for participation. See above.

Closure: See above. Allow time for students to make notes about today's class activities. Put these notes into notebooks.

## Sample Lesson Plan Using “Antigone”

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### (from Period of Starting Points)

Objective: To have students find inspiration for their plays and begin writing, also to grow in confidence using Theatre games. (This lesson plan may be good for several class periods.)

Intro: Build a machine

Cognitive Activity: Identify the form in which the play is written. Identify format for character names, stage directions, etc. Identify characters, objectives, conflicts. Observe how the play

shows and does not tell. Identify character actions. Identify conflicts in terms of Individual vs. Society, the personal vs. the legal, divine law vs. human law, failure/success, desire and value. Seek out contemporary parallels.

Creative Activities: Students take time to write down an event that had special significance to them, or to write out an experience or wish that has meaning to them. Students write down examples of what groups they belong to and how they belong. By what actions do they belong? Each student writes down examples of how he or she is personally valuable. Each student writes down a detail or details of their own individualism. This detail should be a detail. It does not have to be complete or all-encompassing example, but rather a window into each individual. In addition to these writing activities, I will choose or devise games that establish a sense of personal efficacy and control within each individual as they participate in group games. These activities open a rich lode for further creative playwriting work that can be physicalized. All physical work encourages organic growth through experiential learning.

Evaluation: See above.

Closure: See above.

The third period is the Development/Middle Stage Period. This involves more active writing assignments. Students will be asked to write out scenarios, objectives, stakes, character actions, and dialogue in the creation of scenes. They are encouraged to be fantastic in their imaginations. We will propose many scenes and play with the objectives, stakes and actions. We will play out the scenes, taking turns. We will observe entrances and exits. We will look to clarify single actions. It is likely that students will write more than one scene as part of a story but not know the distinction of scene, so this is a time to separate each scene and develop them completely. We will consider the difference between daily conversation and a play's dialogue, the difference between TV and stage, the difference between movies and stage and real life.

Helpful to the teacher of playwriting is the "Poetics" by Aristotle, a book that describes elements of dramatic composition. Even though he wrote it more than 2000 years ago, it remains the central book on drama as we know it. Aristotle's definition of drama is that it is the imitation of an action. (Actually, Aristotle's word was not "imitation" but mimesis, which is a process impossible without an integrated, non-alienated society. But, let's ignore that for these purposes!) The important thing about the "Poetics" is that Aristotle gave us a way of talking and thinking about drama. We know that drama is not the same as narrative, that drama is action, that the stage is a visual area, that characters are the embodiment of action, that characters face obstacles in achieving their objectives, that changing the stakes changes the magnitude of the drama. I need to break down these ideas and give them to students as simply as possible. To have students record notes for their notebooks would be part of the cognitive activities; exercises that apply these ideas would be part of the creative activities. Note that much of this can be challenging if not daunting to the student. Thus, it very important that they are able to focus (from previous periods together) and that they can have fun. Remember to go back to simple games when possible.

As part of the cognitive activities I may or may not bring in examples of scenes from plays. It really depends

on what the students need. I had originally considered using Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" as a further example to play on the themes of the Individual vs. Society. But students may not be able to use more material of this kind.

However, during this third period we will read Latoya Hunter's autobiography. Discussion will center on her story and moments of conflict. Hers is a good example of narrative writing. Through the use of imagination and scenario, it is possible for students to physicalize some aspects of her narrative and translate those passages into dramatic scenes. I want students to develop scenes she describes as well as scenes inspired by her story. Students will write these out using scenario form, and then fill in dialogue. Perhaps it is possible to break down the whole book, have students compose scenes, and put together an original dramatic piece. Discussion of a play's form will take place here: the story play, the unfolding character play, and other forms. We will discuss how a narrative "tells" a story and how a play "shows" a story using dramatic actions. Even as students work together to develop a dramatization of Hunter's book, they also work individually to write their own plays.

As another possibility, some students may prefer to work not on Latoya Hunter's autobiography, but rather on a book entitled "Scorpions" written by W. Meyers. "Scorpions" is set in Harlem and involves teenage life, gangs, and survival. This book can be translated from the narrative into a kind of dramatic representation. I include it as a possibility to increase the likelihood of success in our classroom.

Although the following descriptions of activities are not formal lesson plans, they propose activities toward our extrinsic goal of playwriting. But, in preparing the formal lesson plans, it will be important to remember my original motives for total organic student growth, not simply training in Theatre.

## Sample Creative Activities for Period of Development

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1. Individuals act out physical disabilities: blindness, hunched back, twitches, itches, etc. Develop given circumstances by writing down—Who am I? What do I want? Where am I right now? Why am I here? When is all this taking place? What other physical features describe me?—Voice? Clothing? Anything in pockets or handbags? How is my hair? What kind of shoes? etc.

(Characters may also be developed through costume pieces, props, and/or games described previously.)

2. What does this character want? How badly does this character want what he says he wants? Responses may be improvised or written down.

3. Present an obstacle to the character. Change the obstacle. Make it external. Make it internal. Improvise.

4. Put various characters together. Improvise. Pursue objectives.

5. Devise a character based on objective. This is the embodiment of an action. Examples: Someone who wants to run away from home. Someone who doesn't want to be lonely anymore. Someone who wants to get back at someone else. Someone who wants to win the love of someone else.

6. Write a monologue addressed to the person who is hiring for the job perfect for you. You must have the job to support your family.

7. Write a monologue for various characters: a rapper, a teacher, a garbage collector, a mayor of a city.
8. Write a scene with two characters. Emphasize entrance and exit. (Where are they coming from? Where are they going? This is a way to specify action. When the action is complete, the characters exit.)
9. Use handprops in a way in which they were not intended. Develop a scene with objectives, entrance and exit.
10. Take one day's entry from Latoya Hunter's book. What does she want? What is her obstacle? Can you devise a scenario composed of character(s), objective(s), setting?
11. Propose various scenarios for improvisation.
12. Find visual representations that distinguish characters in frozen statues. Ex. Four characters are shipwrecked on a desert island. Three have given up hope of rescue. One character refuses to give up.

For other scenarios, seek out visual representations that embody actions in frozen statues.

Numerous other exercises and activities are possible. The key is in keeping the activities fun.

The final period is the Period of Completion. In this period, students will bring fleshed out scenes to class for other students to act. This is a workshop setting. Each person will have a chance to act and direct and watch. The writer must be able to observe his/her own scenes acted out. The actors and the audience may contribute ideas to the scene. Writers have the assignment of making a revised draft based on what they observed in class. In addition, students may choose to bring in scenes from well-known plays and act those out.

## CONCLUSION

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Richard Courtney proposes that dramatic activity is the process by which we come to know our world and ourselves. I agree completely. Drama holds possibility for profound changes in individuals. If guided with total organic growth in mind, adolescents can come to develop not simply skills in Theatre class, but an actual and



authentic sense of their own identities, imaginations, freedoms, choices, and responsibilities. Stereotypes of ourselves and others fall away. An Individual connects with an authentic sense of one's own possibility in the world. This is not an idealistic statement, but a profound and simple fact of drama's ancient function.

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Hunter, Latoya. "The Diary of Latoya Hunter—My First Year in Junior High." New York: Crown Publishers, 1992.

Written by a thirteen-year-old girl, the book chronicles the life of a girl going to school in one of New York City's toughest neighborhoods.

Ibsen, Henrik. tr. by James McFarlane, "An Enemy of the People, The Wild Duck, Rosmersholm." Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1988.

"An Enemy of the People" is the drama of Dr. Stockman who finds microbes in a town's therapeutic baths.

Meyers, W. "Scorpions," New York: Harper Collins, 1990.

This is a book about teenage life in Harlem. It is the story of one boy, his friends and family the pressures of a gang.

Sophocles. tr. by Elizabeth Wyckoff. "Sophocles I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone." Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

This is Sophocles' play of the young woman who defies the law forbidding the burial of her brother and must pay with her life.

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An excellent book for teachers that argues that our imagination and the dramatic actions that result are the key ways we live and learn. The book examines this process from perspectives of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. For such a slender volume, it delivers a great deal. It proposes that we re-think the nature of education and provides ways in which we may begin to implement curriculum through the use of drama. Highly recommended.

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This is an important book that describes exercises and methods for actors that involves a complete mental and corporeal commitment for the actor.

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Written by a thirteen-year-old girl, the book chronicles the life of a girl going to school in one of New York City's toughest neighborhoods.

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"An Enemy of the People" is the drama of Dr. Stockman who finds microbes in a town's therapeutic baths.

Linklater, Kristin. "Freeing the Natural Voice." New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1976.

This book provides detailed exercises in deep relaxation, alignment, and the use of the voice.

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This is a madcap book that provides exercises and discusses the nature of drama, imagination, ensemble acting, and natural responses on the stage. Highly recommended.

Meyers, W. "Scorpions," New York: Harper Collins, 1990.

This is a book about teenage life in Harlem. It is the story of one boy, his friends and family the pressures of a gang.

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This is a book for both the apprentice and the experienced playwright. It is a thorough and stimulating book for the playwright.

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Spolin's books are a primary source for theatre improvisation games and exercises. These books, especially the first one, have

influenced two generations of theatre artists.

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