



D Y P F

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DYPF 2026-2027 Playwrighting Activities and Exercises

Activities

Beads on a String (Group Exercise)

Focus: Plot Development and Logical Story Structure

Intention / Objective:

Understanding **linear storytelling**—how to create a logical plot where each moment leads to the next. Plot is often thought of as the what of the play, what happens.

This exercise emphasizes:

- **Simplicity** – each plot point leads to the next. How does it give context without dumping exposition?
- **Cause-and-effect thinking** in storytelling – why does this happen?

Directions:

1. **Start the Chain:**

- Choose one student to stand at the front of the room and say the **first sentence** of an original story.
 - Example: “It all started when I found a strange key in the hallway.”

2. **End the Chain:**

- Choose another student to stand at the opposite side of the room and say the **last sentence** of the same story.
 - Example: “And that’s how I ended up owning a haunted lighthouse.”

3. **Build the Middle:**

- Invite other students to come up **one at a time**, forming a line between the beginning and ending students.
- Each student adds **one sentence** to the story, placing themselves in the position where their sentence logically fits in the sequence.

4. **The Goal:**

- The completed line of students represents a **string of “beads”**—each bead is a key plot point.
- The goal is to ensure that the story makes **logical sense from start to finish**, with each sentence flowing naturally into the next.

5. **Facilitator Role:**

- As the story is built, the teacher or facilitator can pause to ask clarifying questions or suggest changes if the sequence doesn’t flow.
 - “How does this event cause the next one?”
 - “What sentence informed yours? Was it the immediate previous or earlier in the thread?”

6. **Discussion / Debrief:**

- After the full story is created, go through it sentence by sentence.
- Ask: What works? What feels out of place? What are loose threads?
- Discuss how **clear, onstage action or dialogue** communicates information better than assumed or invisible backstory.

Guidelines for Students:

- Keep your sentence **simple and active**—something that **happens**.
- Think: “What happens next?” Plot is the what of the story.
- Focus on cause and effect: “**Because this happened, that happened.**” This could be something right before your sentence or any sentence already in the story.

Key Takeaways:

- A plot is a **sequence of events**.
- How do you keep the economy of your play at the forefront?
- Because the audience only knows what they **see and hear** on stage, how do you add context and subtext without detracting from the story?

Trading Places (small groups)

Focus: Choosing the Right Setting

Intention / Objective:

The goal of this exercise is to explore how **environment shapes character behavior, dialogue, and tone**. Students will write a short scene, then "**trade**" its **location** to see how the same interaction changes when placed in a different setting.

This helps students understand:

- The importance of setting in storytelling
- How physical and social context influence dialogue and character choices
- How to adapt a scene creatively without changing its core conflict or relationship

Directions:

1. **Pair Up and write a 1-2 page scene with two characters.**
 - Choose a universal conflict and situation (e.g. running late, borrowing something, forgetting something somewhere)
 - Choose your first location: Set the scene in an everyday, recognizable place (e.g., a coffee shop, a classroom, a doctor's office, a locker room, a kitchen).
2. **Rehearse or Perform the Scene** in that location.
3. Now, "**Trade Places**" and **Perform Again**:
Without changing the dialogue, shift the setting to a completely different environment—ideally one that contrasts sharply with the first.
4. **Class Reflection:**
 - What changed? What stayed the same?
 - Which version felt more powerful or interesting, and why?
 - How does setting support or challenge character intention and behavior?

Key Takeaways:

- **Setting influences everything** – setting changes context which informs the conflict, tone, movement, and stakes

The Unspecific Play (Individual to Group)

Focus: Subtext and Context

Intention / Objective:

The goal of this exercise is to explore how setting and character work add **Subtext and Context to a scene**. Using *The Unspecific Play*, attached at the back of the packet, you will be adding specificity through character and setting.

Directions:

1. As individuals, use the character worksheet attached at the end of the packet to create a character.
 - a. The more in depth, the better.
2. Pair up and choose a setting. Read through the play aloud as your pair of characters.
3. Choose a new setting. Read through the play aloud again.
4. **Class Discussion:**
 - a. How did the new setting change what the characters meant?
 - b. How did the different characters within the class change the subtext of the dialogue?
 - c. Why did the scenes feel different?

Key Takeaways:

- **Subtext and Context** – the audience sees what is put on stage not the script.
 - How do you add subtext and context, so that it can be understood on stage?
 - Setting and character changes the subtext and context
- Plot is the what. Subtext and context is the theme which is the why.

Six Ways to Say Something (group to individual)

Focus: Setting, Character, and Dialogue

Intention / Objective:

This exercise helps students understand how **a unique character voice** shapes their dialogue. By expressing the **same basic idea** through different characters, students explore how **background, personality, age, education, region, and worldview** all influence the way people speak.

Directions:

1. **Start with a Simple Sentence:**

Write a **line of dialogue** with a clear idea behind it. Examples:

- "It's hot outside."
- "We're going to be late."

2. **Brainstorm Six Characters:**

Come up with **six different character types**. Things to explore:

- Age, Occupation, Background, Genre

3. **Translate the Line and Read Aloud:**

Assign each student or group one character. **Rephrase the original line** that fits how **that character** would say it. *What* For example, starting with:

"It's hot outside."

Here are six possible rewrites:

- **Cowboy:** "It's hotter'n a branding iron on a July afternoon."
- **Kid:** "I think my face is melting!"
- **Scientist:** "The ambient temperature has exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit."
- **Old-timer:** "Ain't seen heat like this since the drought of '52."
- **Poet:** "The sun blazes like a cruel god, unrelenting and wild."
- **Surfer dude:** "Perfect day to catch some rays, bro."

4. **Class Discussion:**

- How does each version feel different—even though the idea is the same?
- What does the **word choice** reveal about the character?
- What effect does **tone** and **delivery** have on meaning?
- Which characters were most memorable or believable? Why?

Key Takeaways:

5. The **way something is said** reveals just as much (if not more) than **what is said**.
6. Characters come to life through **specific language**.
7. Good writers think about how a character's **background, mindset, and personality** is shown in every line they.

The Unspecific Play Script

This is the script for the activity of The Unspecific Play between characters A and B.

A: Why did you do that?

B: What?

A: Whaddaya mean WHAT?

B: It had to be done.

A: I disagree.

B: There is no disagreeing or agreeing. It had to be done.

A: And so you just...plunge forward?

(pause)

A: Is it safe?

B: There's no way to tell.

A: I don't know.

B: Then don't bother.

A: All I do is bother.

B: Suit yourself.

A: I will.

B: Suit yourself or bother.

A: BOTH.

Character History Worksheet

Developing strong characters starts with understanding who they are, where they come from, and what drives them.

Basic Info

- **Character's Name:** _____
- **Gender:** _____
- **Age:** _____

In the play:

1. **Who are they right now?**
 - a. What is their occupation?
 - b. What is their routine?
 - c. What breaks the routine?
 - d. What do they want?
 - e. What stands in their way?
 - f. How do they go about getting it?
 - g. Where do they live? Work?

When creating character, you can know everything. When starting to write, focus on the immediacy of who they are in the world of your play.

Background

1. **Where was this character raised? How does this affect them? How were they raised? Siblings? Parents? Guardians?**
2. **Why is this their routine? How did it start?**
3. **How did they get their job? How does it affect their economic status? What education was required for it? Are they smart?**

Daily Life & Relationships

4. **What is their relation with the other(s) in this play?**
5. **Are they in love? How did it start?**
6. **What is this character's family like? How did it affect who they became?**