

Dramatic Writing Workshop: Bangkok Teacher's Network 2007

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Objective: The aim of this workshop is to provide a handful of useful and practical writing exercises that can be used in a variety of settings with a focus on grade levels 6-12 (although, some exercises can be adapted for use with lower and upper elementary grades). These exercises have been used successfully in both theatre and language arts classrooms.

Activities:

Dialogue Letters:

Objective: Students should be able to produce a two person dialogue that has a clear conflict, beginning, middle, and ending.

Time: 15-20 minutes

1. Ask students to write a letter to an imaginary person and to give that person a name. This letter is supposed to ask for something (preferably a corporeal item) that they really desperately need.
2. Next, have students write a response letter from that person politely denying their request for the item in need.
3. Have the students write another letter more sternly asking for whatever it is that they need and follow this up with a another response, though less polite. Have these letters go on back and forth with tone getting more serious with each subsequent response.
4. At some point (I usually look for a total of 6 or so letters) ask the students to write a final letter denying the item.

The result is essentially a dialogue between two people with a conflict revolving around a specific object. Finally, I pair

students up and have them practice and then perform their dialogues.

Shoe Monologues:

Objective: Students should be able to produce a 1-2 minute monologue from another person's perspective.

Time: 20-25 minutes (depending on class size)

This exercise was developed by a performance artist from New York as a way of "walking in somebody else's shoes." I usually use this after I've explained what a monologue is.

1. Have students sit in a circle with a notepad and pencil ready.
2. Ask them to remove their shoes.
3. Have each student drop their shoes in the center of the circle and state some truth about the shoes beginning with the words "These are the shoes that..."
4. After each student has placed their shoes in the center, have the students select a different pair of shoes from the center. When they select this pair they must say something about the shoes that they feel is appropriate for them beginning again with the words "These are the shoes that..."
5. After each pair of shoes has been picked, have the students walk the shoes around the room (I tell them specifically not put them on just walk them around with their hands). They should get a feel for the shoes and where they have been and what they have done. Ask them if the statement they said still feels true after walking them around a bit. They are looking to get a sense of these shoes and something interesting that they may have done.
6. I let the students return to their notepads when they feel ready to write. They are to construct a monologue beginning with the words "These are the shoes that..." However, this does not have to be the same statement they made previously.

7. Finally, once students have finished they place the shoes back in the center in an interesting position that represents something about what the shoes are doing in their monologue and they read their monologue to the class.

_____ **Banned??!?!?**

Objective: As a class students will construct a 15-20 minute play revolving around some item being banned from society.

Time: 2-3 Class periods

1. Choose an item to be banned. Physical objects tend to work best although I've led and participated with some interesting things banned like Time or Love.
2. Assign or let students choose writing partners.
3. Assign scenes for students to write. Give them only the titles with as little explanation as possible.
 - a. "Public Service Announcement"
 - b. "Getting Caught in the Act"
 - c. "On the Black Market"
 - d. "Imprisoned"
 - e. "The Ban is Lifted"
4. Have students write 3-5 minute scenes using the titles provided. There is no need to collaborate characters as the nature of the play is episodic.
5. Read the play as a class. Discuss problems or needed revisions and allow time to revise.
6. Lastly, perform the thing.

Make sure to let students know they can use as many characters as you have students to read for them.

10 Minute Musical

Objective: Students will write and perform a ten minute musical using songs provided by the teacher.

Time: 4-5 class periods.

This exercise can be used in a variety of ways, however is suited best for theatre arts or drama classes. This exercise is meant to be used for adapting an uncommon piece of literature (works best with Kafka parables); however, the theme can also be developed by the students.

1. Designate groups of students (5-6), preferable dividing singers and the better writers equally amongst the class.
2. Give students a short story or parable to read and discuss.
3. Hand out CDs with three generic songs to each group. Each CD contains (with melodies):
 - a. Introduction
 - b. Power Ballad
 - c. Finale
4. Have students adapt their stories into 10 minute musicals. Each song is about 2 minutes so there is really only 4 minutes of dialogue to write. Having participated in this exercise I find asking pairs of students within the group to focus on one of the three songs works much better than trying to write them all together.
5. Rehearse and perform.

You can add whatever guidelines best suit your class. I usually require students to turn in a typed script with set designs and group reflections. This exercise also works best by letting the students create the most "out there" and loose adaptations they can.