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Move Over Shakespeare

A Comprehensive Guide to
Teaching the Art of Playwriting

by Christine Harvey
and Jennifer Zwiers

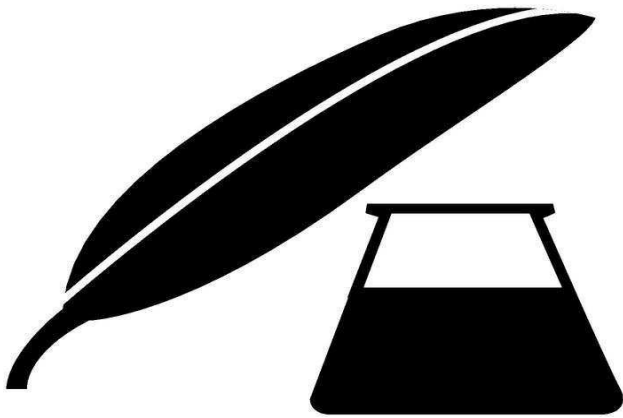
**From Monologues to
One Act Plays**

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MOVE OVER SHAKESPEARE

**A Comprehensive Guide
to
Teaching the Art of Playwriting**

by Christine Harvey and Jennifer Zwiers



**Featuring Three Complete One Act Plays Ready for
Classroom Use:**

**A Fairytale Medley
A Look All Her Own
The Legend of the Lost and Found Box**

Teach Playwriting in Your Classroom Today! This fun and dynamic playwriting unit is full of interesting approaches to playwriting. By stimulating student curiosity and interest, and integrating fun games and activities, this unit helps teachers take young people step by step through the playwriting process. by stimulating curiosity and interest and by integrating fun games and activities. Evaluation tools, plays, other resources included.

Christine Harvey is the founder of the "Not So Amateur Amateurs", a non-profit theatre company in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. She writes and co-directs for the company and has written twenty-two theatre pieces, including two full-length and one one-act musical. Her works have been published in both the UK and Canada.

Over the years she has directed more than sixty-five children's plays, organized numerous drama clubs, taught drama at five different schools, and instructed drama workshops. Other roles have included head of drama for Dreams In Motion (a performing arts school in Gananoque, Ontario), drama consultant, actor, and performing coach for Children's Aid Society training videos, and director, coordinator and resident playwright for Young Artists of Kingston (YAK) since 1997.

She has acted in commercials and videos, has participated as a performer in Kingston's Standardized Patient program, and is a collective owner and actor in the Spotlight Surfers, a traveling acting troupe that has performed at several birthday parties, schools, City of Kingston events, and the Kingston Buskers Festival. She also oversees the Drama portion of the KYAC program in Kingston, Ontario.

Christine Harvey is a co-owner of Drama Queens Publishing Company (www.dramaqueenspublishing.com) and recently won a grant from Curriculum Services Canada to develop Move Over Shakespeare.

Jennifer Zwiers is a wife, mother of two beautiful girls, and teacher. She received her Bachelors degree in drama and religious studies and her Bachelors of Education at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. She is the co-founder of The Not So Amateur Amateurs: Kingston's Young People's Non-Profit Theatre Company, and runs a successful drama club at her school. She has written many scripts, and helped others to write their own.

Table of Contents

Introduction to Move Over Shakespeare: Teaching the Art of Playwriting 5

Section 1/Part 1: Introduction – Plays and Playwrights 11

Section 1/Part 2: What is a play and how is it different from a story? 40

- **The Legend of the Lost and Found Box 45**

Section 2: Creating Characters: One Dimensional vs Multi-Dimensional 57

Section 3: Monologues 69

- **Teacher’s Pet 78**
- **The Phone Call 80**

Section 4: Dialogue 85

Section 5: Short Self-Contained Scenes 91

Section 6: One-Act Plays 97

Section 7: Conclusion and Possible Extension Activities 104

- **A Fairytale Medley 114**
- **A Look All Her Own 125**

INTRODUCTION:

This playwriting unit is to be used by junior and intermediate teachers. It covers curriculum expectations in drama and language. Educators are encouraged to pick and choose activities and/or adjust them so that they are appropriate for their class. Each section of this unit is self-contained and can be taught in isolation from the others, although the sections are organized in a logical progression from simpler forms of playwriting to more difficult forms of playwriting.

This unit will take students through a step-by-step process, starting with monologues, and then progressing towards more advanced forms of playwriting such as one-act plays. Each section begins with an improvisation game and/or activity that will introduce a playwriting approach, skill, or concept. This is done to spark the interest of the class and engage them in the playwriting process. Improvisation activities also often generate ideas for scenarios and dialogs, which the students can apply while playwriting.

Worksheets, exemplars, and playwriting prompts will help reinforce the approaches, skills, and concepts emphasized within each section. Activities range from independent, to partner work, to small group work, to class discussions. Evaluation, approaches, suggestions, and materials including rubrics and checklists will accompany every writing activity.

How to Adapt this Unit for Your Class

This unit can and has been successfully implemented in junior and intermediate classes. The plays that are provided have been accepted favorably by students of all ages as each group brings a different perspective and understanding to the scripts. Questions have been provided that target junior groups and intermediate groups separately, but use these questions with discretion, depending on the ability level of the class.

The drama activities and improvisation games are what makes this unit particularly unique, flexible, naturally adaptable, and accessible to a variety of classes and students. Each group will bring their own level of understanding and complexity to each activity.

These games can be played again and again and because students will learn more each time they participate and will refine the skills that the activities are meant to reinforce. Because games engage the students' interest, their inspiration will flow more freely and creatively, while at the same time encouraging them to function at their fullest capacity.

Rationale: Playwriting Makes the Writing Process More Accessible to Students

Playwriting is a beneficial form of writing in which to have students engage because students are asked to focus on writing conversations, and, as we all know, talking is something in which young people participate regularly. Projects such as lab reports, expositions, and compare and contrast essays are often foreign to students and are not things that they use in everyday life outside of the classroom.

Dialogue, however, is a writing style that students are highly familiar with because young people converse and socialize naturally and willfully. Asking students to write down their conversations and giving them structure helps them to begin mapping out story lines based on their own discussions and experiences. It also encourages students to listen to what people are saying around them.

In order to properly develop characters in their plays, students will need to examine the way that people talk and the language that different people use and thereby determine how a person's verbal communication reflects on the individual's personality and disposition. Students may even find themselves reflecting on the way that each of them uses language and how people perceive them based on the language they use.

Such reflection is important and valuable not only in a student's school career, when doing oral presentations and reports, but also when being interviewed for a job position, working in customer service, or assuming other leadership roles in the community.

Skills Obtained by Students

Teachers with impressive results have successfully implemented this unit in classrooms. In general, students have had a very positive attitude towards playwriting, and the students' eagerness drives them to excel. Students' oral skills are enhanced by participation in improvisational activities, their writing

abilities refined when editing based on feedback from peers, and their creativity sparked by the energy and confidence inspired by participating in dramatic activities.

Students gain skills in brainstorming, creating story outlines, developing characters, editing, experimenting with new vocabulary, and becoming more familiar with literary concepts such as humor, conflict, stereotypical characters, personification, and much more.

How Performance Relates to Playwriting

This is a playwriting unit, not a performance unit. However, playwriting is linked to performance because every playwright must write with a vision in mind of how the play will look onstage and consider how an audience will accept it. Performance is, after all, the purpose for playwriting. Performing a script and/or reading it aloud, helps students evaluate how close they are to achieving their vision.

Novice playwrights have difficulty knowing how their scripts will turn out in performance. Often dialog looks good on paper, but sounds different when it is spoken. Also, seeing a script performed, and noting all of the motions that the actors make, helps students to determine how detailed their stage directions need to be. Therefore it is very important for students to understand that performing their scripts is a necessary part of the editing process.

In addition, there are many improvisation and drama activities included in this unit that help to spark ideas for characters, dialog, and plot. Some teachers may pick up this unit and feel uncomfortable with the performance aspects or the dramatic games and activities described. Please do not let a case of stage fright deter you or your students from using and enjoying this unit.

Many teachers with no or little experience in drama have integrated these activities into their classrooms successfully. You do not need to be experienced in theater or performance in order to properly implement this unit. The activities in this unit can work in any classroom as long as you employ the following approaches:

1. Display a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards playwriting and drama activities.
2. Create a safe, fun, and non-threatening environment so that your students can express freely.

3. Encourage students to respect their classmates when they are performing and to never insult another student's acting abilities or character interpretations.
4. Give clear instructions to the students. If the class seems confused about what you have said, reword or repeat the instructions until they understand what you are saying.
5. Encourage cooperation and sharing of ideas.
6. Encourage students to ask questions throughout the activity in order to seek clarification or understanding.
7. Always list a behavior that is unacceptable and make it known to the class that such behavior will not be tolerated. If they behave inappropriately, shut down the game or activity until the behavior is rectified.
8. If you are going to employ consequences for inappropriate behavior, make sure that you make it clear what those consequences will be before starting the activity. The students should be aware of the limits before they begin.

Resources

The resources provided in this unit are helpful but do have some limitations. Many of the resources require Internet access and competency on the Internet. Also, the majority of the plays provided are written by myself, Christine Harvey, and although they are very usable and well liked by people of all ages, they only provide a very narrow slice of what playwriting is all about.

My plays have a very particular style, perspective, and approach. It is important for young people to be exposed to many different playwrights. Unfortunately, this means that you will have to spend some time in the library or spend some money. This being said, it is worth it for your class to receive the full playwriting experience. Here are some resources that I recommend. Please intersperse these and other resources throughout the unit where ever you can.

Children's Plays for Reader's Theatre (or Readers Theatre),
With 16 Play Scripts From World Folk and Fairy Tales and Legends including African, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, Russian, Scandinavian, and Native American by Aaron Shepard

Theatre for Young Audiences: 20 Great Plays For Children by Maurice Sendak

12 Fabulously Funny Fairy Tale Plays by Justin McCory Martin

Cinderella Outgrows the Glass Slipper and Other Zany Fractured Fairy Tale Plays
by Joan M. Wolf

Magnificent Monologues for Kids (Hollywood 101) by Chambers Stevens

Minute Monologues for Kids by Ruth Mae Roddy

Cool Characters for Kids: 71 One Minute Monologues by Janet B. Milstein

If you are looking for additional information on how to write a play then please refer to the following resources. These authors take some different approaches to playwriting than the ones outlined in this unit and you may find their techniques helpful.

Young Playwrights 101 E-Book by Jonathan Dorf and You Can Write a Play by Milton. E. Polsky

Evaluation

Evaluation can be used for two purposes within this unit: to determine what still needs to be taught for student success; and as a summative assessment of what the students have learned by the end of the unit. Using both approaches to assessment will maximize student achievement.

Although several sections include evaluation tools, the primary evaluation should be based on whether students have successfully fulfilled the criteria listed in each section under the heading: **At the end of this section, students should know.**

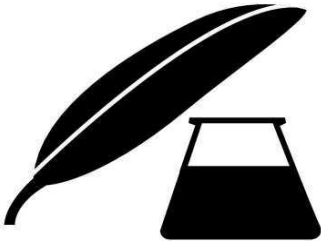
Self and peer evaluation should be constant throughout the unit because it is very important that during the playwriting process, students continually reflect on their work and their understanding of concepts as well as gathering and considering peer feedback. Even if an evaluation tool appears in a single section of the unit, it is not meant to be used only once within that section.

Please feel free to use the evaluation tools over and over again throughout the unit. If you are using an evaluation tool in order to assess an assignment, then give the student the tool before they begin the assignment. Go through the tool with the class so that the students understand what they are being marked on. But please do not rely too heavily on marking tools, rubrics, or number and letter grades.

It is always more useful and meaningful to encourage and implement evaluation that provides constructive feedback and usable critiques. Thereby the students can use such input to improve their work or inspire them to advance their skills and understanding of certain concepts. After all, our chief goal is to help our students learn about and write plays, not to put a mark down on their report card.

Also, for those students who aspire to make playwriting their future profession, the most realistic and productive form of evaluation for them will be audience reaction, reviewers comments, publishers' interest, the amount of royalties they receive, and the feeling they get when they see their own play performed, not what mark their teacher gave them on their first playwriting attempts.

Section 1/Part 1: Introduction – Plays and Playwrights



This section teaches the following concepts:

- Information about famous playwrights and the plays they write
- Different styles of plays and how to categorize them

At the end of this section, students should know:

- What a playwright is
- Who some famous playwrights are and what they have written
- A variety of play genres
- That there are playwrights who are active in their community (extension activity)

Materials Needed:

- Access to the internet
- Photocopies of black line masters provided
- Dictionary or literary reference book

Resources Included:

- Playwright List
- Playwrights and Plays List
- Activity cards with plays and playwrights

Teacher Introduction and Discussion

(Junior Approach) Ask the class to think back to a time before television. In this time, people still had a desire to be entertained, so theater was their main source of entertainment. Today there are people who write movie and sitcom scripts, but before them, there were playwrights who wrote for the stage. These playwrights were very popular and well paid, and although they were not as respected as journalists, novelists, and short story writers, they were more respected than the actors who brought their characters to life.

Plays were often written to be used for only a season, but just as we love reruns, the public loved seeing their favorite plays, performed again and again. Plays were kept and were interpreted differently by different directors and actors. Although the scripts have remained the same for centuries, scenery, costuming, and interpretations have changed. Playwriting still continues today as the theater is always looking for new scripts that reflect and relate to our modern society.

(Intermediate/Advanced/Extension Approach) The primary purpose of successful playwrights has been to entertain their audience. However, throughout the years, playwrights have also been hailed as artists and educators. There is a lot of debate as to whether playwriting is more of an art form, an academic tool, or a form of entertainment for the masses. Although plays have been written for all three purposes, the ones that are most successful are the ones that were able to entertain.

1. **Entertain** – Shakespeare, for example, wrote primarily to earn a living. He did this by writing plays that people enjoyed watching, thus bringing in more revenue. He was a businessman and his plays have survived because he catered to his customers' desire to be entertained. Ask the class to list other plays that are written to entertain large audiences.

Also ask the following question (especially if the class struggles with listing other play, because many young people these days do not have opportunities to acquaint themselves with theater.) What is entertainment? What does it mean to be entertained? What entertains you? What entertains audiences in general? What movies do you like? Why do you like these movies? What makes them entertaining? What movies make a lot of money at the box office? Why do these movies make money? What qualities do Shakespeare's plays have that are similar to the qualities of successful movies today?

2. **Artistic** – Plays with high artistic value can also be entertaining. Art is, after all, a form of entertainment. But how entertaining is it when its only purpose is to look beautiful and not be necessarily dramatic? Morale or mystery plays were artistic plays meant to praise the Lord and reflect and enforce the Catholic religion. Mystery or moral plays, were not terribly humorous, exciting, or dramatic, but they were one of the only sources of entertainment available during the Middle Ages and so people came to watch. These plays served a purpose and were indicative of other art forms of the time, art forms such as paintings, songs, books, stories, and clay statues from that period also had overt religious content. But these plays are rarely performed today. (Shakespeare’s plays are still studied in school because of the messages he conveyed and the masterful artistry of his plays. There are groups of people who believe that Shakespeare should not be performed, but should be studied as an art form only. There are yet others who believe that Shakespeare’s plays are not meant to be read or studied, but only performed because that was their original purpose.) See if the class can list other plays that are artistic that they have seen or heard about. Ask them if they can think of an example of a play they could write that would be considered primarily artistic.

3. **Informative** – Some plays are written with the purpose of relaying information. Plays that are informative are often not as entertaining and therefore only last for as long as the information needs to be relayed. For example, a person may write a play to inform the public about the corruption of a particular political leader. Once the leader is out of power, the play becomes moot on the basis that the public no longer needs that information. If the play is well written, and/or entertaining, it may still survive on those merits, but not on its informative merits. People may refer to the play to learn about a time in history and how the people felt about their leader, but its need to be performed is less compelling. Ask the class to list some plays that they have seen that are informative? What are the advantages of using plays as a teaching technique or to relay important pieces of information?

Discuss as a class what they believe to be the best purpose for playwriting. See if the class can come to some sort of consensus or compromise between these three approaches to playwriting. What is the most effective play - a play that is entertaining, a play that is artistic, a play that is informative, or a combination?

1. Ask, discuss, and answer the following questions as a class:

(Junior Questions) What is a playwright? What does a playwright do? What constitutes a good play script? Who can be a playwright?

(Intermediate/Advanced/Extension Questions) What are some skills that playwrights must have to be successful? How does a playwright improve his/her craft? How have playwrights changed over time? Why do you think certain scripts survive and are loved by audience years later, while others are only popular for a short time and are then forgotten?

2. Tell the class that they are going to explore these questions further by studying playwrights and popular plays in history.

Plays and Playwrights Activity

1. Distribute "Playwright Cards" to the class, making sure that corresponding playwrights and plays are included.

2. At least two plays for each playwright should be distributed in order to form groups of no less than three later in the activity.

3. Choose the cards appropriate to your class and grade level. The Playwright List provided clarifies this.

4. Students should use the Internet to help them find information to fill out their playwright work cards. Students with playwright cards have a responsibility to inform people with play cards of the plays that their playwright has written. This will help the people with play cards narrow their search. For example: If a student has the play "End Games" and they type "End Games" into a search engine or play vendor site, they will get a lot of unnecessary information and more than one playwright for each play name. But if the person with the playwright card informs the person with the "End Games" play card that their play was written by Samuel Becket, then that detail should allow the student to find information on the pertinent play. If you feel it is just easier to give this information to the class as soon as they receive their cards, then that is fine. The teacher can determine what the best approach is for their class and will determine how much time can be allotted to the activity. Telling the people with play cards, who their playwrights are, definitely speeds up the process.

5. Once the students have filled out their cards, they should return to the classroom and match up with their pertinent playwrights and plays. For example: The student with the playwright Shakespeare card should match up with all of the people who have play cards that were written by Shakespeare,

and students who have the playwright Arthur Miller card should join in a group with the other two students who have “Death of a Salesmen” and “The Crucible” play cards.

6. Students share the information they collected with their group members. Students then discuss and answer the following question, which can be written on the board: (Junior questions) What do you think is interesting about these plays? Do you think you would like these plays? Make sure you explain your answer. (Intermediate/advanced/extension questions) Why have these plays and playwrights become popular? Why do they remain popular?

7. The group then delegates a group member to share their information and ideas with the class.

Teacher Follow-up Discussion: Applying the Information

1. On the board write the following categories: Melodrama, Comedy, Romantic, Musical, Tragedy, History Plays, Satire, and Parody. Define each of these categories using a dictionary or a literary reference book. You could have the students looking up the definitions if you wish. Write the definitions on the board next to the term. Make sure that the class understands these genres before you proceed.

2. Write plays and playwrights that they have studied into their appropriate category. Include the nationality of each playwright, and draw special attention to those that are Canadian. (Please see attached resource entitled Playwright List.) Remember that a play and a playwright can appear in more than one category as genres sometimes merge and playwrights explore many styles of writing.

Evaluation

Evaluation of this activity should be based on student’s participation in the activity and their contribution during class discussions. Encourage students to reflect and assess what they have learned about plays and playwrights and whether they have understood the discussion and activities thus far.

Extension Activity

Have the students find a playwright in their community or a playwright that they can relate to based on a mutual demographic. This playwright should be someone they connect with on some level and preferably someone who is non-mainstream. Students could then research the playwright by finding out the following information: name, age, number of plays written, nationality, biography, summary of plays, photo, etc. They could then give a presentation on the information they collect and/or showcase their research on posters that could be displayed on bulletin boards around the class. The students could even have a playwright appreciation luncheon and could invite parents, the administration, and/or other classes to look at their displays, read portions of non-mainstream plays aloud, and/or discuss these great playwrights collectively.

Final thoughts

Tell the class that they are now going to follow in the footsteps of the playwrights they have just studied.

Playwright List

Playwright	Appropriate Division	Nationality
Aaron Shepard	Junior	American
William Shakespeare	Junior/ Intermediate	British
Lois Walker	Junior/ Intermediate	Canadian
Roderick Walcott	Junior/ Intermediate	Caribbean Canadian
Ned Dickens	Junior/ Intermediate	Canadian
Rogers & Hammerstein	Junior/ Intermediate	American
Linda Ghan	Junior/ Intermediate	African Canadian
Mary Melwood	Junior/ Intermediate	
Lerner & Lowe	Junior/ Intermediate	American