

WRITING PLAYS KS2 : THE 1 MINUTE PLAYSCRIPT

Rationale

Teaching pupils to write playscripts can be a daunting task, with pupils often producing long scripts of dubious quality with few stage directions and little awareness of the requirements of the genre . Once written, there is often very little time to perform the plays, leaving the crucial link between script and performance understated.

The fact that these plays last only 1 - 2 minutes each, means that both teacher and pupils are free to concentrate on the quality of the playscript. Also, if pupils are given an opportunity to create the play themselves through improvisation, they have more ownership and more motivation to write the script. The brevity also means that the plays can be performed in a lesson with opportunities for evaluation.

However, unless the pupils are used to this way of working, dramatic improvisations can soon lead to chaos , unless they are well organised and structured with clear boundaries. This one minute drama is highly structured for pupils with limited experience of drama , but can be adapted if pupils are more experienced.

Contexts

Playmaking works best in the context of on-going topics . , Pupils can be invited to invent additional scenes within a class novel , or conversations between eye witnesses to events in a novel. However, some contexts can stand alone, purely for the purpose of playmaking . For example :

- Groups caught on CCTV conversing in a queue for a sporting fixture or music event.
- Groups caught on CCTV conversing about items in a shop window, or near an exhibit in a museum or by a public statue.
- Groups conversing in a waiting room at the doctors, dentist, hairdressers or waiting for a lesson to start.

Tips for organisation and rules for pupils

- Select a suitable context and explain it to the pupils. Make it clear that they will be expected to perform and then write a conversation within this context .
- Organise children into groups of 3 - 4 pupils who are mixed, both in terms of ability and confidence in performance .

Explain the following to the pupils before they begin the work:

- Every pupil in each group will play a role (allocate characters using a fair system such as giving out random letters or numbers) .
- The conversation between the characters must last between 1 – 2 minutes only and will be timed .
- Characters can say what they like as long as what they say does not offend anyone else, such as using bad language or making rude comments .
- Characters should not make physical contact with each other .

(You may want to explain that actors in plays and on films take a long time to rehearse physical scenes so that no - one gets hurt, but in school there is no time to do this) .

- Characters must speak one at a time and take turns to ensure that all pupils say something . (You may want to suggest they speak in turn at first to ensure this) .
- Every conversation must start and end with a freeze - frame.

Rehearsals

- Move around the groups and encourage pupils to craft their work, such as adding contrast and tension or humour (but stress that humour should be amusing and not silly or distasteful).
- When 2 groups have finished rehearsing, stop the rest of the groups and then suggest that they have a timed rehearsal. Ask all groups to start rehearsing their scene on the word Action from yourself. They should fold their arms and sit in silence when they have finished. Explain

that you will time the rehearsal to allow a maximum of 2 minutes. Any performance over 2 minutes will be stopped.

Performance /Evaluation

- Ask groups to perform in turn. They should start with their freeze - frame and begin when you say the word Action . The end of the scene will be signalled by the final freeze - frame.
- Everyone must remain silent when groups perform.
- If groups make a mistake or laugh, they may have only one more chance to start again.
- After their performance, ask groups to comment on what they felt worked best for their own group performance and what they would like to work on if they had more time.
- After each group has performed, the audience should be asked to identify 1 - 3 of the best features of that performance , giving reasons for their choices.
- Discourage pupils from making negative comments about other groups, as this can sap confidence and lead to bad feelings within the class. Once pupils become more used to evaluating their own performances , they can be allowed to express some constructive criticism about the work of others.

WRITING THE SCRIPT

- Ask individual pupils or pairs to use their improvised conversations as a basis for scripted work . Some pupils may prefer to script another group's improvisation.
- Stress the need to add any stage directions for others who may want to perform the same scene. These scripts should be short , lasting about a minute or two, so pupils can focus on the quality of the writing rather than the storyline.
- Give pupils samples of good playscripts as models.

- These completed one minute scripts can be collected into a class book of plays for other groups to perform or read aloud .

Try to organise time for at least one of these playscripts to be performed, so the pupils can see the need for stage directions etc. The individual who wrote the script can be an actor or a director, but the performers need to be given a short time to rehearse before the performance.

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