



Young Playwrights' Theater

A PEEK INTO YPT CURRICULUM

The *In-School Playwriting Program* is YPT's oldest and largest program, serving more than 1,000 students each year. At every partner school, the program is led by professional YPT teaching artists who hail from backgrounds as playwrights, actors, directors and dramaturges. These artists bring diverse skills to the classroom, engaging students with their real-world knowledge of professional productions. Before they begin to write, students are treated to a performance by professional actors. For many students, this is their first time seeing a play. YPT believes it is vital that they experience a theatrical performance before they can imagine creating one of their own. The program includes instruction on characters, conflict, language, inspiration and more, providing students with the tools they need to write their own original plays.

The program culminates in a celebration of the students' achievements. Professional actors return to the classroom, this time to perform excerpts from each student's play.

The YPT *In-School* curriculum addresses the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.

Here is a workshop featured in [Write to Dream](#) that is designed to introduce students to the concept of plays and playwriting:

Workshop: What Is a Play?

Level: Elementary, Middle and High School

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts addressed:

Elementary School:

Writing:

- *W.5.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.*
- *W.5.3b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.*
- *W.5.5. With guidance and support from adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.*

-more-

2-2-2

Speaking and Listening:

- *SL.5.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.*

Middle School:

Reading:

- *RL.8.3. Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.*

Writing:

- *W.8.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.*
- *W.8.3b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*
- *W.8.5. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.*

Speaking and Listening:

- *SL.8.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.*

The YPT curriculum addresses the Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted by 45 U.S. states (and the District of Columbia) as of 2012. All standards included in this text are Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. (Source: www.corestandards.org)

High School:

Reading:

- *RL.11-12.3. Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).*

Writing:

- *W.11-12.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.*
- *W.11-12.3b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

-more-

3-3-3

Speaking and Listening:

· *SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.*

Vocabulary2:

- *Play*: the stage representation of an action or a story; a dramatic composition
- *Playwright*: one who writes plays; dramatist
- *Playwriting*: the act of creating the plot, theme, characters, dialogue, spectacle and structure of a play and organizing it into a script form; the ability to imagine the entire production scene and to put it into written form so that others may interpret it for the stage
- *Actor*: a person, male or female, who performs a role in a play or entertainment
- *Audience*: the group of spectators at a public event; listeners or viewers collectively, as in attendance at a theater or concert
- *Stage*: the area where actors perform
- *Script*: the written dialogue, description, and directions provided by the playwright

Preparation:

- You will need actors to help you with this workshop. Before class begins, you should communicate with your actors to explain their role
- Throughout the YPT curriculum, we use existing definitions for theater terminology from the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) Arts Education Standards, which YPT staff members helped to create in 2008.
- in the workshop and ensure that they have all the materials they need.

Materials:

- A chalkboard/whiteboard, or large sheets of paper to write on
- For elementary school level: copies of the play *The Math Test* (page 247) or another play that can be stopped at the climax
- For middle and high school levels: copies of the play *My Date with Kara* (page 249) or another play that can be stopped at the climax
- Any necessary props for the play

Activities:

Introduction: Begin this initial workshop with a name game or other warm-up activity. Let the students know that you will be teaching them how to write their own original plays.

-more-

4-4-4

What Is a Play? Ask the students this question. Write down their responses on the board. (They will be able to revise their definition later in the workshop.)

Watching a Play: Tell the students that before they begin writing their own plays, they are going to watch a performance of a play written by YPT. Begin the performance. The actors will perform the play until it ends abruptly (at the climax).

What Happens Next? You "Write" the Ending: Ask, "How do you think this play should end?" Have the actors play out the students' suggestions. (If a student suggests an ending that requires an additional character, invite that student to play the role. You can also ask for volunteers from the group.) Discuss each suggestion after the actors perform it, encouraging the students to explore multiple possibilities. Now explain that the students have been acting as playwrights – they came up with ideas, they articulated those ideas and actors performed them for an audience. This is the essence of playwriting.

What Is a Play? Revisited: Ask if there is anything the participants would like to add to their definition of a play. Make any changes on the board, and read the students' definition aloud. Also give each student a copy of the play the students just watched, so the students can begin familiarizing themselves with written scripts.

Reflection: Why a Play? To answer this question, tell the students that there is an innate human need to tell stories. From ancient civilizations that acted out their daily life (the hunt for food) around a campfire to the modern-day phone calls we all make to tell each other about our lives, human beings have built communities through common experiences and the sharing of stories. Tell the students that you will be giving them the tools they need to tell stories through the form of playwriting. But finding the story they want to tell is up to them. It is the most important part of being a playwright, but, fortunately, it's something every human being knows how to do. Invite the students to talk about a time when something happened in their lives and they felt strongly compelled to tell someone else.

Although this particular workshop is regularly implemented by YPT teaching artists as part of the *In-School Playwriting Program*, all of the workshops featured in [Write to Dream](#) contain detailed information that could be easily adapted for instructional use by educators anywhere in the country to engage students no matter what the discipline.

-more-

5-5-5

According to the book, “Playwriting can be a useful tool to teach history, social studies, science and even math. Our curriculum has been adapted to enable students to explore the history of Jamestown, the U.S. Constitution, the life cycle of the butterfly...the possibilities are endless. When students are able to express themselves creatively, they take ownership of their education. We believe that every student has a right to participate in the arts, and we hope that this book can provide access to more students across the nation, and the world.”

###