

Sample Pages from
Calling All Theatre Teachers! The Ultimate
Classroom Playwriting Resource

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Calling All Theatre Teachers

The
ULTIMATE
**Classroom Playwriting
Resource**

By Lindsay Price and Laramie Dean



Calling All Theatre Teachers! The Ultimate Classroom Playwriting Resource
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THE ULTIMATE CLASSROOM PLAYWRITING RESOURCE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Calling all Theatre Teachers: The Ultimate Classroom Playwriting Resource!

In this resource, two playwright educators, Lindsay Price and Laramie Dean, (that's us!) tackle a wide range of questions about the playwriting process. These are the questions that many writers, student or otherwise, ask as they work on a play. Sometimes these questions stop writers, especially student writers, before they've written a single word.

We have both spent many years teaching student playwrights. When we teach, we want more than anything to provide an environment for students where they feel they can write. We know you want the same thing! And that's the purpose of this resource: to help you help your student writers successfully navigate the writing process and be able to finish a play.

How often do you work with student playwrights who feel they can't succeed? They're stuck on the perfect idea, or their perceived lack of creativity, or worse, they fear being made fun of by their peers. We've heard so many students say, *"This is no good, I don't want to share it."*

The key to writing success is to keep writing. A simple concept, but by no means an easy one: it means the writer has to write when they hate what they're writing, or they're overwhelmed by the process, or they don't even know what to write yet. All of this can be especially hard for students to overcome. But writers get better at writing through the act of writing, whether they're writing plays, a script for a movie, a novel, or a short story. A writer will never improve if they stop writing, or if they feel they can only write when they're inspired, or that they must write perfectly. (Whatever *that* means.)

But that doesn't mean you can tell students to "keep writing" and expect it to magically happen. You need a wide variety of tools to share with students so they can develop their own writing process. And that's where this resource comes in! In these pages you will find a wealth of articles, reflection questions, exercises, lesson plans, and more, all designed to keep students writing. A full toolbox for playwriting help that you can pick and choose from to support your students as they become confident writers. That's all we could hope for!

Lindsay Price & Laramie Dean

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource is divided into a number of different categories (ideas and inspiration, the writing process, how to offer feedback, etc.). Within each category there is a category question, an answer in a variety of forms (dialogue, article, list), a set of reflection questions, and classroom exercises derived from the question/answer. You can share the Q and A, and then discuss it using the reflection questions. You can divide students into groups and have them discuss the article before sharing their findings with the class. You can have students come up with their own answer to the category question before sharing the answer. The exercises in each category are specifically chosen to help students apply their knowledge and, more importantly, lead them to write!

A **template lesson plan** is provided on the following page, using one of the category questions as a suggestion for how you can use the material within a class period. A period is defined as 75 minutes. Feel free to adapt, change, add on, or cut to fit for your situation. You know your students best.

LESSON PLAN: READ, REFLECT, AND WRITE

OBJECTIVE

To read and reflect on a specific process question and apply learned knowledge to a writing exercise.

DESCRIPTION

In this lesson, students will read an article that asks the question: "Why do people say, 'Write what you know'? I don't know anything!" Students will reflect on their own answer to the question, consider the response of two professional playwrights, and apply what they learn through an exercise tied to the question. The lesson includes a writing warm-up and a practice writing session.

Time Management: This lesson is scheduled for one class period. A class period is defined as 75 minutes. If your classes are shorter or longer, adjust accordingly.

MATERIALS

- Why do people say, "Write what you know"? I don't know anything! Article
 - Pg 48
- Reflection Sheet
- Exercise Worksheets
 - Pgs 51-54

INSTRUCTION

1. Warm-up (5 minutes)
 - a. Free-write. A timed exercise of non-stop writing on a topic. If a student doesn't like the topic or gets stuck, tell them to write about that. The goal of the warm-up is to keep writing no matter what.
 - i. Topic: What is your favourite season and why? Use the five senses in your response.
 - ii. Time: 2 minutes
 - b. Inner Monologue. Write the inner monologue of an object you can see from your seat. A chair, a poster, the clock on the wall. What is the object thinking about? What would they want you to know?
 - i. Time: 2 minutes

- c. Have students turn to someone near them and share their monologue. With the whole class working at once, this can be a low-stakes way of introducing the reading of work aloud, which is key for playwriting.

2. Introduction (5 minutes)

- a. Ask students if they've heard of the statement "Write what you know."
 - i. What do you think the statement means? What's your first impression of the statement?
 - ii. How would it make you feel if someone said that to you? (Excited? Anxious?)
 - iii. If you had to write a play today, what would you write about?

3. Article (15 minutes)

- a. Give students the article or project it where everyone can see.
- b. Read the article out loud. This can be done as a class or in small groups.
- c. Discuss the article with students. Again, this can be done as a class, or you can provide these questions to small groups. In their groups, students will discuss possible answers and come up with one to share with the class.
 - i. What are the playwrights trying to say in their response?
 - ii. Do you agree or disagree with their response? Why?
 - iii. What's one thing you connected with in the article?
 - iv. What's one thing that surprised you?
 - v. What's one question you still have?

4. Reflection Questions (15 minutes)

- a. Transition students back into writing mode by having them think and respond to the following questions. You can have them answer in their drama journals or use the Reflection Sheet.
 - i. What kinds of stories do you like to see? What's missing in the stories you watch in movies, tv, etc.?
 - ii. What characters would you like to write? What's missing in the characters you see in movies, tv, etc.?
- b. Divide students into small groups and have them share their responses. What are the similarities and differences?
- c. This is a good time to bring up the fact that every writer is unique when it comes to how they think and what they decide to write. It's impossible to think like someone else or write like someone else, no matter how hard one tries. Focus on what you want to write, rather than trying to imitate someone else.

5. Exercise: Brainstorm (20 minutes)

- a. Students will now apply the concept of “write what you know” in the manner discussed in the article. Each of these exercises is structured the same way; you can do them all or just one of the three. A worksheet is included for each exercise.
- b. **Family Brainstorm**
 - i. Take two minutes to brainstorm everything you know about your family. Don’t self-censor or judge your writing. Don’t worry if it’s something you don’t want to share publicly; you won’t show this brainstorming to anyone.
 - ii. At the end of two minutes, go through your writing and analyze it. What stands out? What things do you repeat? Are there any themes? Is there anything that you don’t want to share? Are there any details you want to flesh out or change? Remember, even though you’re brainstorming about your “real” family, you’re eventually going to be writing a piece of theatre, which is fiction. Change a name if you want. Change a couple of details. Change it so you feel comfortable writing about it.
 - iii. Make a list of family material to use for future source material. Rip up, shred, or delete your original brainstorm notes if you want to.
- c. **Likes and Dislikes Brainstorm**
 - i. Take two minutes to brainstorm your strongest likes. What do you love? Why do you love these things? How do these likes influence, inform, and impact you?
 - ii. Don’t self-censor or judge your writing. Don’t worry if it’s something you don’t want to share publicly; you won’t show this brainstorming to anyone.
 - iii. At the end of two minutes, go through your writing and analyze it. What stands out? Is there anything that you don’t want to share? Are there any details you want to flesh out or change? How would you feel about giving a character one of these likes?
 - iv. Now, take two minutes to brainstorm your strongest dislikes. What do you hate? Why do you hate these things? How do these dislikes influence, inform, and impact you? For example, how do you feel about people who like these things?
 - v. At the end of two minutes, go through your writing and analyze it. What stands out? Is there anything that you don’t want to share? Are there any details you want to flesh out or change? How would you feel giving a character one of these dislikes?
 - vi. Make a list of likes/dislikes to use for future source material. Rip up, shred, or delete your original brainstorm notes if you want to.

d. **Emotion Brainstorm**

- i. Take two minutes to brainstorm everything you feel about three emotions: happiness, sadness, and anger. How do you express each? What are your strengths and challenges with these emotions?
- ii. Don't self-censor or judge your writing. Don't worry if it's something you don't want to share publicly; you won't show this brainstorming to anyone.
- iii. At the end of two minutes, go through your writing and analyze it. What stands out? What things do you repeat? Are there any themes? Is there anything that you don't want to share? Are there any details you want to flesh out or change? Remember: even though you're brainstorming about you and your reactions, you're eventually going to be writing theatre, which is fiction. Change a couple of details to make it less you. How would you feel about giving a character one of these emotional characteristics?
- iv. Make a list of emotion material to use for future source material. Rip up, shred, or delete your original brainstorm notes if you want to.

6. **Practice Writing Session (15 minutes)**

- a. Students are to choose one of their lists: family, likes and dislikes, emotion.
- b. Have them pick one item from that list.
- c. They will write their chosen item at the top of a blank page. This could be in their drama journals (if you're using them) or on a separate piece of paper.
- d. Students will write a scene using their chosen item.
 - i. First, they will decide on two characters for their scene. Who are they? What are their names? Don't worry about getting the perfect names, just choose two. If this causes anxiety for students, tell them to use seasons (Winter, Autumn, Spring, Summer) or colours. Don't use numbers or letters.
 - ii. Next, students will decide on a location. Where will the scene take place? Don't worry about the perfect location, just choose one. If that causes anxiety, pick a room in a house.
 - iii. Next, students will decide on a relationship between the two characters: friends, family, or a partnership.
 - iv. Students will then write their scene. If the first line is causing students anxiety, start with a conflict between the two characters. "What are you doing here?" or "I can't believe you did that." or "You better explain yourself."

- v. If you have students who are fast writers, pair them up and have them read their scene aloud. The writing process is individual. It will take some students twice as long to finish their scene as others. Decide if you want to give students more time in another class or if the act of starting the scene is sufficient for where students are in their learning. You know your students best.

7. Wrap-Up

- a. Celebrate with students. They have just taken a topic based on something they know, brainstormed an idea, come up with characters, and written a scene.
- b. If you have time, see if any students are comfortable sharing their scene with the class. Don't push this — it's high stakes to share one's work out loud. You can also have students turn to someone beside them and have everyone read at once for a lower stakes scenario.

REFLECTION

What kinds of stories do you like to see? What's missing in the stories you watch in movies, tv, etc.?

What characters would you like to write? What's missing in the characters you see in movies, tv, etc.?

CATEGORIES

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

The starting point for most playwriting projects, and most writing projects in general, is an idea. From this idea characters are born, stories are created, and lines of dialogue are written.

The issue with the idea as a starting point is twofold:

- Writers judge their ideas and are often looking for something perfect.
- Writers feel the need to be inspired to write. If they're not inspired, they never start.

One thing to emphasize to student writers is that **ideas are not plays**. Also, the **perfect idea** does not exist. Ideas are only the starting point on the writing journey. An idea can be a sentence, an image, an object, a fragment, a headline, a "what if?" question. All of these things can be gathered to form the idea and start a writer on the path to writing a play.

Another thing to emphasize is that developing a **habit of writing** is always going to result in more finished work than **inspiration**. Inspiration is a fair weather friend. Writers often feel that, if they aren't inspired, then they aren't a writer, or that they shouldn't even sit down to write unless they are "in the mood." What real writers do is write, even when they don't want to. They write ugly words that clearly don't work; they free-write; they write scenes or paragraphs or sentences that might not necessarily find a home in a final draft (or the next one, for that matter).

But what if your students want to be inspired? What if they feel it's important? They're in luck because **inspiration is everywhere**, even when it doesn't seem like it. Writers find inspiration in song lyrics, in headlines from news stories, in stories they love. Inspiration may strike when a writer looks at a photo or a painting or a statue. It can be found in memories, dreams, defining moments from the past, family legends. Inspiration can come from overheard conversations, observations, personal opinions, and more! If students make it a habit to gather inspiration on a regular basis, they'll never run out of ideas.

QUESTION: How do I get Inspired to write?

It's a question that every writer asks themselves at some point in their process, whether they've been writing for years or are just starting out. Writers are supposed to write from a place of inspiration, aren't they? But what is inspiration? And what if it doesn't come every time you sit down to write? Inspiration will often disappear when you need it most.

There are other ways to gather ideas and make sure you get words on the page during every writing session. That's the goal: words on the page.

- **Pay attention to the world around you:** movies, books, conversations. Everything is fodder for a potential scene; inspiration is everywhere.
- **Re-frame what makes writing happen.** The habit of writing is more important than being inspired in the writing process. If you wait for inspiration to strike before you begin writing, you might be waiting a long time.
- **Create a habit of writing instead of relying on inspiration.** To create a habit of writing, consider setting a time to write every day. It can be five minutes, ten minutes, or more. Just make sure it's a time you can commit to on a consistent basis. If you focus on getting something, *anything*, done, you'll make your way to a finished draft. Alternatively, you could commit to a certain word count to reach each day.
- **Decide on a "when" that works for you.** It's going to be different for every writer. Does the morning light inspire you? Does a certain day of the week give you time to write? Does setting a specific time in the calendar motivate you? Decide when you're going to write and stick to it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you think writing ideas come from?
2. How would you come up with an idea for a writing project?
3. What is a topic you'd love to see in a play or movie that you haven't experienced yet?
4. Do you feel you need to be inspired to write? Why or why not?
5. Is inspiration necessary for writing? Why or why not?
6. If you were to personify "inspiration," what would it look and act like?
7. Do you think you can write? Why or why not?
8. Respond to this statement: "The habit of writing is more important than being inspired to write." What do you think about this? Do you agree or disagree?

TAKE ACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Share, Discuss, Reflect

- Share the question article with students. Have them discuss their own thoughts on the question and share the provided answers. Then, choose one (or multiple) reflection question(s) and have students respond.

Inspiration Personification

- Divide students into small groups. Each group will come up with a 30-second scene that includes a personification of Inspiration. What would they look like? Sound like? Act like? Give students five minutes to put their scene together and then share.

Inspiration Sentence Starters

- Give students the following sentence starters:
 - I define inspiration as...
 - Inspiration is something that...
 - When I think about writing a play I...
- Give students five minutes to complete the sentence starters and share their answers. What are the similarities and differences among your students?

Timed Writing Practice

- Practice writing to a time limit. Set a short time limit (two minutes) and give students a topic. Students are to practice writing without stopping for the time limit. They're not to worry about formatting, staying on topic, or even writing in sentences. The focus is to keep writing for the entire time limit.

EXERCISE: INSPIRATION FILE

Task: Create a file (digital, hard copy, folder, scrapbook) of possible inspiration sources. This is something you can refer to when you need to write, come up with an idea, or work on a group writing project.

WHAT CAN YOU PUT IN THE FILE?

Words that you love

- Poems
- Song lyrics
- Quotes

People and stories that make you want to write

- A list of people (fictional or real) that you want to write about
- News story headlines
- Articles/speeches

Look for pictures and then answer the following questions:

- Why did you pick this picture? What caught your eye?
- What would you write based on this picture? Who is the main character?

Focus Objects: Write about four objects in your life that mean something to you. Why did you pick these objects? What do they say about you?

Personal Credo: Write out a personal credo paragraph that starts with “I firmly believe...”

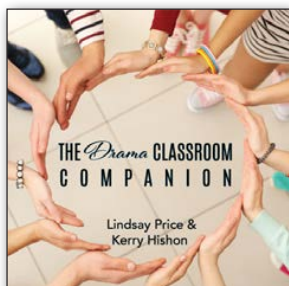
Memories: Write about your favourite, least favourite, and oldest memory.

Emotions: Write down 10 emotions. Which one is your favourite/least favourite and why? Give a colour to each emotion. Give a sound. Give an action.

WHAT ELSE CAN GO IN YOUR INSPIRATION FILE?

Teaching Resources

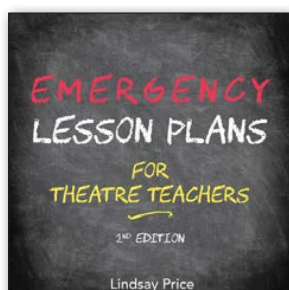
Quality resources to use in your drama classroom



The Drama Classroom Companion

The Drama Classroom Companion is filled with articles and exercises to build the skills needed for theatrical performance as well as real world skills like creative thinking, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.

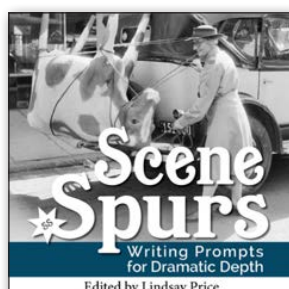
theatrefolk.com/companion



Emergency Lesson Plans For Theatre Teachers

Emergency Lesson Plans For Theatre Teachers, 2nd edition gives you the tools and resources you need to confidently leave your class in the hands of a substitute teacher. Customize your lesson plans to suit the specific needs of your class when you can't be there.

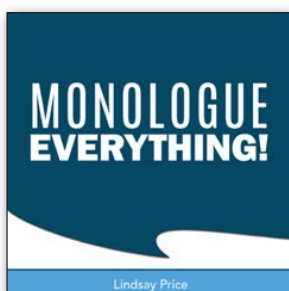
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Scene-Spurs: Writing Prompts for Dramatic Depth

Scene Spurs is a collection of photo-based writing prompts developed by playwright Lindsay Price. The set includes 35 different Spurs along with an instruction guide to integrate them into your drama classroom.

theatrefolk.com/spurs



The Monologue Everything Program

Want your students to write their own monologues? Have you tried to incorporate monologue units into the classroom with less-than-satisfactory results?

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Practical Technical Theater: The Complete Solution for Technical Theater Classrooms

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All monologues and scenes come from published plays and include running-times, descriptions, character notes and staging suggestions.

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The Student Director's Handbook

Help students take their show from first audition to opening night with *The Student Director's Handbook*. This easy-to-use ebook is full of guidelines, tips and templates designed to help students create a vision, circumvent problems and organize rehearsals on their way to a successful production.

theatrefolk.com/student-director



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Your students want to write and perform an original play. You want to include a playwriting unit in your program. But where to start? What if your students have never written a play before? What if you've never written before?

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