

What is a play?

A. Literary Form –
Dramatic Literature

B. A story written to be
performed by live actors
for a live audience.

C. Various Formats:

1. Short plays or ten-minute plays
2. One act plays
3. Full-length plays
4. Musicals
5. Radio Dramas



Why do we write plays?



Playwrights have something to say about what is important to them.

Plays reflect back to society what we are concerned with in our personal lives, our community, our country, and our world. They communicate through the dramatic arts.

How is a play different from other forms of writing? How are they the same?

How can writing plays enhance or improve other literary forms?

What about the differences between stage plays and screenwriting?

The Nature and Structure of Successful Plays:

All plays have three basic parts: a beginning, middle and end. (So do stories.)

All plays center upon a central conflict. (So do stories.)

Plays are written to be performed, and not to be read. Scripts have specified formats.



Rock of Ages at the Grandstreet Theatre, 2016

Five Parts of the Story Play:

1. Inciting Incident
2. Rising Action
3. Complications/conflicts
4. Climax
5. Denouement

How to begin to write a play:

1. Buy a spiral bound notebook just for your playwriting. Carry it with you.
2. Buy a three ring binder and dividers, and plastic envelope folders to stash newspaper articles, or print out ideas from the internet.
3. Write every day, even if it's just for 10 minutes.
4. Don't limit yourself. Let your subconscious help you by jotting down whatever comes to mind.



1. Brainstorm for stories, or eavesdrop on conversations in a public place.
2. Pick a location and decide what happens there.
3. Make a list of conflicts. (Hint: all conflict is based in emotions. There are 36 dramatic situations.
4. Pick a person and put him/her in a story with a beginning, middle and end.
5. Write a scenario. (Look over the guidelines handout.)

Homework:

Write three first scenarios. Bring them to next class.

Guidelines for a Scenario for a play

- Written in narrative format.
- Written in third person voice.
- Written in the present tense.
- It describes action as it happens on the stage. “First this happens, then this happens, etc.
- Has very little dialogue in the first scenario. Final scenario contains around ½ dialogue.
- Feelings are described: “he angrily says, or responds. Or, “they argue about...”
- Identifies the theme.
- Identifies the mood.
- Identifies the time of the play. (time period: The Present. The Seventeenth Century, etc.
- Answers the question, why now? (this is from the viewpoint of the characters in the play.) Why not yesterday in the world of the play? Why now?
- Describes the location of the play.
- Describes what kind of play: A short play, A one-act, A Full-length, etc.

Sample Scenario by Janice Wilson

Ranger/ATVer Encounter

A female ranger is standing under a sign that indicates that motorized vehicles are not allowed on the trail. On the trail behind the sign, sitting on the ATV is a male dressed in camouflage. He has a rifle and a dead animal on the back of the ATV. They are challenging each other in a stare-down. The ranger indicates to the ATVer that he turn off his machine. He very slowly complies, crosses his arms and moves his feet to the ground on either side of the ATV.

The ranger identifies herself to the ATVer who does not respond in kind. The ranger says that it appears that he has been hunting and using an ATV in forbidden territory. Insolently, the ATVer acknowledges that's what it looks like. She asks him to show her the tag on the animal which he reluctantly finds in one of his pockets and hands it to her. She looks at it and notes that it does not match the territory that the permit is issued for. He does not respond. She says that she'll make an exception in this particular instance and asks him to attach it to the animal carcass. He reluctantly complies. Then, she says that it appears that he has been using the ATV in forbidden territory and that she will have to cite him for that infraction and asks for his name and his hunting license.

The ATVer leans over to start the machine and says that it will be hard to prove when there is no evidence. The ranger warns him that would not be the thing to do. The ATVer sits up straight and slowly raises his hands to the ATV handlebars. The ATVer stares insolently at the ranger and leans over again to start the ATV. The ranger repeats the warning and the request. The ATVer smiles in challenge and begins to turn the key. The ranger swiftly unholsters her gun, pointing it at the ATVer. The ATVer hesitates and then stands up slowly to get off the machine. The ranger quickly moves the gun from the ATVer and shoots the ATV's engine, retraining the gun on the ATVer.

The ranger is standing and the ATVer is sitting on the ATV and raises his hands up in the air. It is a stand-off between the two, enveloped in the smoke wafting from the gun into the air. The silence is filled with the sounds emitting from the ATV. Lights fade out.