

Second Workshop in Playwriting



Presentation created by Pamela Jamruszka Mencher

Analyzing a Script Based on the Five Parts of a Story Play **(Specifically for Short Plays)**

1. The Inciting Incident:

An inciting incident launches the action of a play. We should discover who the major characters are and what the main conflict of the play is. In a short play, this needs to happen immediately, within the first two pages.

2. Rising Action:

Rising action typically takes place in the 2nd, 3rd and maybe part of the 4th page. It shows how the characters initially deal with the problem at hand and what tactics they use in confronting and/or trying to solve the problem. These tactics are based upon the traits of the character's personality and should also be expressed in dramatic action that shows character motivations that rise from physical, emotional or mental traits as they respond to the problem at hand.

3. Complications/Conflicts:

This section of the play shows increasing complexity as we watch the characters either succeed or fail in their tactics of solving the problem. There should be a sense of escalating tensions that leads to a point of “no return”. The sense of power should shift among the characters, one seems to be “winning”, and then as the situation develops, the power shifts to another. They all struggle for what they want over the other characters. This section typically happens on the 4th, 5th, 6th, and possibly part of the 7th page.

Analyzing a Script Based on the Five Parts of a Story Play

(Specifically for Short Plays)

(Continued)

4. Climax:

This part is the culmination of the escalating conflicts and complications caused by the characters' actions in the previous section. This is the point where everything comes to a head, and after this point, everything changes. Somebody “wins” or “loses”. It is the “high” point of the actions taken by the characters as they work to achieve their goals. It all breaks wide open. Typically, this happens on the 7th or 8th page.

5. Dénouement (Resolution):

This is the end of the play and may take a couple of pages to come to some form of resolution. It is the aftermath of the climactic moment. It doesn't have to be wrapped up in a tidy solution, but rather expresses a finish of some sort. It can be left open-ended, but should offer some form of closure. It can leave us with a feeling of what may come next after the play is over, or how the characters' relationships have changed based upon what happened in the play. The last lines should clearly express a type of “tah-dah” moment.

Sample Script Analysis based upon the Story Play Format

THE SUITORS

A short play

By

Pamela Jamruszka Mencher

Cast of Characters

Richard: The richer, handsome brother

Thomas: The smarter brother

Suzette: A young woman

Time and Place

The entire action of the play takes place in a sitting room reminiscent of the Eighteenth Century.



Image/source: Americanrevolution.org

LIGHTS UP TO REVEAL AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SITTING ROOM. WE HEAR:

SUZETTE (ENTERING.)

No, no!! Leave me alone!

Thomas and Richard FOLLOW HER.

THOMAS

Please, Suzette, forgive my idiot brother.

RICHARD

You're as much to blame as I am!

SUZETTE

Do you know how much you embarrassed me? And, in front of the Duke, no less! I want to die of shame.
(Begins to sob prettily.)

THOMAS

Oh, my little love sparrow, please do not cry.
(Takes a handkerchief from his pocket)

RICHARD

Please, forgive my ill-mannered brother.
(Has also taken out a handkerchief.)

BOTH BROTHERS TRY TO DAB AT ***SUZETTE'S*** EYES. THEY ARE ON EITHER SIDE OF HER AND ARE ONCE AGAIN IN A BATTLE WITH ***SUZETTE*** IN THE MIDDLE.

THOMAS

Get out of my way, fool!

RICHARD

Idiot!!

SUZETTE

(Breaking away from them.)

Stop it, stop it! LISTEN TO ME RIGHT NOW!!!

RICHARD AND THOMAS

Of course, my sweet, what is it?

SUZETTE

We can't go on like this. We must end it all now!

PROTESTING, THE MEN RUSH TO EITHER SIDE OF HER, GO TO ONE KNEE,
TAKE HER HANDS AND KISS THEM.

RICHARD

Oh, my dear, sweet Suzette, you must not say that. Allow me to take you away from here, perhaps a stroll in the garden will soothe you.

THOMAS

I think a carriage ride down by the lake is a better remedy. Moonlight reflecting off the water is known to have strong, curative powers.

THEY START A TUG OF WAR WITH **SUZETTE** IN THE MIDDLE.

RICHARD

Don't listen to him, my love. Come with me.

THOMAS

No, no, no, allow me to take you away, far, far away.

SUZETTE

(Freeing herself.)

Stop, stop! We cannot go on like this. A woman should never come between brothers.

RICHARD

What would you have us do, my beautiful butterfly?

SUZETTE

I want you to decide which brother will be my one true love. I may have only one, not both.

THOMAS

No! You should decide, not us.

SUZETTE

I cannot because I love both of you equally. Now, I will return to the party while you discuss it. I mustn't keep the Duke waiting.

(Starts to exit, stops.)

I'll be back soon. Adieu!

AS SHE EXITS, SHE TAKES A FLOWER FROM HER HAIR AND FLINGS IT AT THE BROTHERS. AS SHE IS GONE THE BROTHERS LEAP SIMULTANEOUSLY FOR THE FLOWER. WRESTLING, THEY MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE COUCH.

RICHARD

She dropped it for me!

THOMAS

No! Tis mine!

THEY BOTH PICK IT UP BY THE STEM AND GRASP IT HIGHER AND HIGHER
UNTIL THEY CRUSH THE PETALS IN THEIR FISTS.

RICHARD

Let go.

THOMAS

Richard, Richard, we must cease this fighting and discuss this in a civilized manner!

RICHARD

Fine, agreed. Let us place the flower between us and discourse like the gentlemen we are.

THOMAS

Agreed.

THEY PLACE THE CRUSHED FLOWER BETWEEN THEM.

RICHARD

Well, you got us into a nice mess, brother.

THOMAS

I did not. You caused our trouble, not me.

RICHARD

How are we going to comply with our beloved's request?

THOMAS

I clearly should be the one to have her.

RICHARD

Nay, I am richer and more handsome than you.

THOMAS

So? I'm smarter. Look, we're getting nowhere by discussing this. I say we make the decision through a series of contests. The winner of two out of three wins Suzette. Agreed?

RICHARD

What kind of contests did you have in mind?

THOMAS

You choose one, I'll choose one, and then we'll agree on the last together.

RICHARD

All right. Agreed. I shall choose first.

(Thinks a moment.)

Ah, I have it.

(Takes off his cravat.)

Here, take one end, we shall have a tug of war. Here is our middle point. The first one to be pulled over this line loses!

THOMAS

Agreed!

THEY PULL ONE WAY AND THEN THE OTHER, WITH MUCH COMIC EFFECT.

RICHARD

(Pulls him off side.)

Hah! I win!

THOMAS

Ok, ok, you don't have to gloat. Now it's my turn to choose. I say we arm wrestle.

RICHARD

All right. Agreed.

THEY ARM WRESTLE WITH MUCH COMIC EFFECT, AND THOMAS WINS.

RICHARD

No fair, your arm is longer than mine.

THOMAS

Now, now, be a gracious loser.

RICHARD

All right, we are tied at one each. What shall we do for a final competition?

THOMAS

I think it must be to the death. I cannot live without my darling Suzette.

RICHARD

Nor I. All right, to the death it is. Shall we wrestle?

THOMAS

No, I suggest that we do this the honorable way.

(He crosses to table where there is a pistol display box.)

I suggest that we have a duel to the death. Pistols at 5 paces.

RICHARD

The survivor will win Suzette. The other shall receive a beautiful funeral.

THOMAS

Agreed.

THEY EACH TAKE A PISTOL. STAND BACK TO BACK.

RICHARD

Ready?

THOMAS

Yes. One.

THEY TAKE ONE STEP AWAY FROM EACH OTHER. CHECK TO SEE IF THE OTHER DID THE SAME.

RICHARD

Two.

REPEAT BUSINESS OF LOOKING BACK.
THOMAS

Three.

REPEAT BUSINESS.

RICHARD

Four. Wait, brother, wait. It occurred to me that one of us will soon be dead. I think we should bid each other farewell now, for I fear it will be too late afterward.

THOMAS

Ah, yes, good thought.

AS THEY EMBRACE.

RICHARD

I shall miss you brother, you have been good to me.

THOMAS

Oh, not as good as you have been to me, brother. I shall miss you as well.

SUZETTE (ENTERING)

(Calling off stage)

I'll be right back, Dukey, honey.

(To the brothers.)

Ah, there you are. I've come to tell you that I have decided that I don't want either of you.

RICHARD AND THOMAS TOGETHER

What?

SUZETTE

I said that I don't want either one of you. I have found someone else.

RICHARD AND THOMAS LOOK AT EACH OTHER.

SUZETTE (CONTINUED.)

Well, aren't you going to answer me?

RICHARD AND THOMAS SIMULTANEOUSLY SHOOT HER. SHE
DROPS WITH A SCREAM.

THOMAS

I say, brother, I believe she was right, after all.

RICHARD

Oh, in what way?

THOMAS

When she said that no woman should ever come between brothers.

AS THEY EXIT, THEY PLACE THE PISTOLS ON A TABLE.

RICHARD

I couldn't agree with you more. To brotherhood, brother.

THOMAS

Yes, to brotherhood! May nothing ever come between us.

RICHARD

Hear, hear!

THEY SLAP EACH OTHER ON THE BACK AS THEY EXIT, LAUGHING. AFTER A
MOMENT **SUZETTE** MOANS AND SITS UP.

SUZETTE

Oh my, those two are absolutely mad! Their horrible behavior made me faint!

(She rises to the table with the pistols.)

Tsk, tsk. It's a good thing Father only uses blanks in these pistols. Else I might have been killed!

(She replaces them in the box, adjusts her hair, dress, etc.)

Ah well, it is good that I am finally rid of those crazy brothers.

(Calling off as she exits.)

Dukey, honey, you simply won't believe what just happened to me! Dukey!

SHE IS GONE, AS LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

CURTAIN.

Homework:

Choose one of your scenarios and write a second scenario using the five parts of the story play as guidelines. It helps if you label it in sections and write some sentences in each one: First, create a character description for each character, and then identify the time and place of the play in a sentence or two. Then write:

Inciting Incident: Two brothers, Richard and Thomas are in love with the same woman, Suzette. They enter, fighting with each other for her attentions. She gets frustrated with them and finally declares that she can't stay involved in their relationship as it is. She tells the brothers that she's going back to the party and that they need to decide which of them will be her lover between them. She promises to return.

Rising Action: The brothers argue about who should have her and why, and after insulting each other, then decide to hold a series of contests to determine who should win Suzette.

Conflict/Complications: The brothers first decide to do a tug of war using one of their neckties as the rope. They pull back and forth over an imaginary line until Thomas wins. They next decide to arm wrestle and Richard wins. Finally, they decide to really up the stakes by having a duel with some convenient pistols left there by Suzette's father. As they are taking the steps in the duel, they are overcome with remorse and sadness, but still are resolved to finish the duel. Just as they are about to complete it, Suzette comes back, hollering over her shoulder to the Duke offstage, promising him that she'll be back. Of course, the brothers hear this.

Climax: Suzette tells the brothers that she has decided that she doesn't want either brother after all. The brothers, already very frustrated and upset over the situation, vent their anger by "shooting" Suzette, who falls to the ground. The brothers, not being very bright, or worried about having killed her (showing how shallow the morals were in the fashionable set of the 18th Century) exit, vowing never to let any woman come between them again.

Dénouement/Resolution: Right after the brothers leave, Suzette sits up and says that she had fainted from the fright of being "shot". We find out that the pistols were loaded with blanks because her father would never leave loaded pistols lying around, and that was lucky for her! Then she shows how shallow she is by saying as she runs off back to the party, "Dukey, Dukey, you'll never believe what just happened to me!"