

# Fourth 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 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and maybe part of the 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and possibly part of the 7<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> 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. It should clearly signal the play is done.

# 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 early Nineteenth Century.



Image/source: Americanrevolution.org

## Analyzing The Suitors

**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 18<sup>th</sup> 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!"

# HOMEWORK: DUE FEBRUARY 19

Write two scenarios using the five parts of the story play as a guide. Write it in the present tense, and describe what is happening. Include some dialogue if it occurs to you, but focus more on what is happening. Do not create more than three characters. All of the following scenes should happen in a single location, not multiple places. The action should be continuous and not jump around in time. Type it and bring it to class on February 19.

Choose two of the following ideas:

1. You want to ask someone to have dinner and then see a movie or play with you. You are friends with this person but have never been alone with him/her. You are afraid of rejection but really want to do this. You start to ask, and then change the subject at least three times. Then, something happens and everything changes. How does this end?
2. You come across someone crying. You don't know the person and are uncertain what to do. Finally, you decide to approach the person and find out if you can help. At first, the person is embarrassed but finally breaks down and tells you what has happened. What do you do about it?
3. Your best friend did something that hurt you. You confront him/her and expect to break up the friendship. Instead, the friend asks for another chance. What does the friend do to make you believe that s/he is sincere so that you reluctantly decide to give it another chance but you make conditions. What conditions do you ask for, and what assurances does the friend offer that you can trust?
4. Choose the best, worst or funniest event that has happened to you or someone you know. Craft the scenario according to the five parts of the story play. Keep it in a single location.
5. Make up a story using the five parts of the story play to organize it. Do not include more than three characters. Use only one location, and be sure the action is continuous, in the present and doesn't jump around in time.