



# YOUNG SPACE MAKERS

## WEEK ONE: PLAYWRITING

### Hi!

My name is Ella and I'm a theatre maker and director. In Young Space Makers, we're going to explore the process of making a play; from writing a script to designing the set to putting it on in a theatre! Each week, we'll focus on a different part of the process and look at people who have certain roles to bring a play to life. You can use this worksheet alongside our digital sessions or on its own if you can't make our zoom meeting one week. Enjoy!

### What's a Playwright?

Watch this video first: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzpNBwNR9C0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzpNBwNR9C0)

Then, answer these questions:

What does 'wright' mean?

What are the three main things that a playwright should consider when starting to write a play?

What is it called when characters talk to each other in a play?

Who else might the Playwright work with to bring the play to life?

### Famous Playwrights

The most famous Playwright is probably William Shakespeare, who wrote 39 plays and over 150 sonnets (poems) in the 1600s. Although these plays were written a long time ago, Shakespeare's plays are still performed today across the world. His plays can be performed traditionally (as they were originally) or can be modernised (updated and put in modern day settings).

#### SEARCH FOR YOURSELF

Have a look at 'The Globe Theatre' to see some traditional versions of Shakespeare's plays. Then, search to see if you can find a modern version of a Shakespeare play at a different theatre (Hint: The National Theatre is a good place to start!). See if you can also find any famous films that are based on Shakespeare's plays.



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## Devising

Playwriting is usually the first thing that happens in the process of making a play. However, there are lots of other ways of making theatre that doesn't always start with writing a script. Sally Cookson is a famous director who makes her plays by asking actors to improvise and play with a scene first, before it gets written into a final script. Sally explains her process a bit more in this video:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mJ02mSvbEM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mJ02mSvbEM)

### TRY IT YOURSELF

Take a book that you like and pick a moment from the story. Ask your friends or family to try and act it out, whilst you direct them. Make sure you tell them what needs to happen in the scene, and most importantly, how it should end. See if you can write the lines your actors improvised into a script afterwards.

## Getting ideas

It can be tough to know where to start when writing your own play. There are lots of ways playwrights can generate ideas for a play, so they know which characters will be in the play what happens in the plot. Here are some exercises for you to try:

### FREEWITING

Get a pen and paper (or computer/tablet to type on if you prefer) and a timer. Set your timer to 3 minutes. The aim of this exercise is to write or type for 3 minutes without stopping. If you get stuck or run out of things to say, just write/type 'I don't know' over and over again until a new thought comes into your head.

Here are some topics you can choose to write about in your three minutes:

- The best day of your life
- What you would do with 1 million pounds
- What will life be like in 50 years time

Try and be strict with yourself and don't stop writing! When your timer is up - don't worry if your writing doesn't make sense or seems confusing. You can then give yourself another 3 minutes to EDIT your writing. This means you can get rid of any 'I don't know's' or any repetition, or change words around, but you can't ADD anything new.

### CHARACTER MONOLOGUE

Get a recent newspaper or open up the BBC news homepage and pick an article. Pick one person who they speak about in the article (this could be an expert, someone's family member, the Prime Minister!). Try to write a monologue (a speech where just one person speaks) from the perspective of that person. For example, if I picked this news article: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-53557876](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-53557876) I might write a monologue from the perspective of Hilary Mantel, which will be about the pressure she is feeling to win the Booker Prize for the third time.



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## Putting your ideas into a script

Now you've got your idea, it's time to turn that into a script. First, it might help to write out a list of your *characters* (who is in your play), a list of your *settings* (where the characters will go in the play) and a rough overview of your *plot* (what happens in the play). Break up your plot in three sections: the beginning, the middle and the end. These will become your three *scenes* (or *Acts* as they're sometimes called).

### STRUCTURING YOUR PLAY

To make sure your play is interesting and exciting, your scenes should follow this structure:

**Scene 1 (beginning):** Introduce the characters, setting(s) and start of the plot. Your characters might talk about something they want or need to do.

**Scene 2 (middle):** Your characters might encounter a problem or have some conflict. This could be something that is stopping them from getting what they want or need.

**Scene 3 (end):** Your character(s) find a solution or succeed in getting what they want or need. Remember the ending doesn't always have to be a happy one!

For example in the story of *Peter Pan*, the scenes might look like this:

**Scene 1 (beginning):** Peter Pan flies into Wendy Darling's room to find his shadow and convinces her and her brothers to come to Neverland with him and his fairy, Tinker Bell.

**Scene 2 (middle):** In Neverland, Peter and the Darlings live with the lost boys, with Wendy acting as the boys' mother. They meet and battle with Captain Hook and his pirate crew.

**Scene 3 (end):** They defeat Captain Hook and then The Darlings return to London, where their parents adopt the lost boys. Peter remains in Neverland, but returns in the future to take Wendy's daughter on an adventure.

### SETTING THE SCENE

Playwrights usually start their play by describing the *setting* the play starts in. This might even include describing how the stage looks or what time of day it is. Here's an example from *Peter Pan*:

The Darling's Nursery. Evening on a summers day. There are 3 beds and a chair. A large open window is on the right of the room. The Darling Children are playing pirates; John and Michael are sword-fighting, John is Hook and has a hook for a hand hook. Michael is Peter Pan and uses a rolled-up umbrella as a sword. Wendy is tied to a chair with loose ropes.

### DIALOGUE

Your *scenes* are made up of what your characters say, or their *dialogue*. The aim of a Playwright is to tell the story through what the characters are saying. The *dialogue* is written so we can see which character is saying the line, like this:

**Mr Darling:** What on earth's all that noise about?

**Michael:** We're just playing our favourite game, father.

**John:** Peter Pan versus Captain Hook and his pirates.

**Mrs Darling:** Well, it's time to drop anchor and climb into your hammocks, children.

**Children:** Hammocks!?

**Mr Darling:** It's nautical speak, for beds.

Try writing your first *scene* (the beginning of your plot) using *dialogue*, said by your characters.



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## STAGE DIRECTIONS

As well as *dialogue* you can also use *stage directions* to tell your story. This is where you describe something that might happen in your *plot*, without using *dialogue*. You can use *stage directions* when a new character comes into the scene or someone leaves the stage, when the setting might change or when your characters do something. Here are some examples:

*Enter Mr and Mrs Darling (Stage Left)*

*The Children giggle and jump onto their respective beds. Wendy takes a rolled-up jumper from under her pillow and cuddles it close.*

*The Children settle down to sleep and the lights dim*

**Add some stage directions to your first scene in between your dialogue.**

## Putting it all together

Here is what your scene might look like once you've put everything together:

### Peter Pan - Scene One

The Darling's Nursery. Evening on a summers day. There are 3 beds and a chair. A large open window is on the right of the room. The Darling Children are playing pirates; John and Michael are sword-fighting, John is Hook and has a hook for a hand hook. Michael is Peter Pan and uses a rolled-up umbrella as a sword. Wendy is tied to a chair with loose ropes.

*Enter Mr and Mrs Darling (Stage Left)*

**Mr Darling:** What on earth's all that noise about?

**Michael:** We're just playing our favourite game, father.

**John:** Peter Pan versus Captain Hook and his pirates.

**Mrs Darling:** Well, it's time to drop anchor and climb into your hammocks, children.

**Children:** Hammocks!?

**Mr Darling:** It's nautical speak, for beds.

*The Children giggle and jump onto their respective beds. Wendy takes a rolled-up jumper from under her pillow and cuddles it close*

**Mrs Darling:** What's that you're cuddling, Wendy?

**Wendy:** Oh, it's nothing really.

**Michael:** It's Peter Pan's shadow!

**Mr Darling:** (chuckles) Peter Pan's shadow? Now don't be silly, Peter Pan isn't real. Come along, goodnight children.

**Children:** Goodnight mother! Goodnight father!

*Exit Mrs and Mrs Darling (Stage Left)*

*The Children settle down to sleep and lights dim*

**Continue to write your dialogue and stage directions for the other scenes in your play (the middle and the end). Congratulations, you have written a play!**



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### Editing

It's important to read over your work and edit your writing. Once you have read it back, perhaps some bits might not make sense or you might want to add something to make it more exciting. The ending is often the trickiest part when writing a play, as it's hard to tie up all of the things that have happened or find a solution to any problems your characters have had in the middle section. If you get stuck or run out of ideas, come back to the **FREEWRITING** or **CHARACTER MONOLOGUE** exercise to help you get new ideas. For example, you could use the Freewriting exercise on the topic of 'what do I want?' to find out what your main character wants or needs.

### Getting Feedback

When you're happy with your play, ask your friends or family to read it aloud. This is called a '*Rehearsed Reading*'. Ask them what they enjoyed about your play and what you could *edit* to improve it. Use this space to make notes after hearing your feedback:

### Next week

Hopefully this gave you an idea of what a Playwright does and how Playwriting works. Remember, you can always ask me questions in our sessions if you have any. Next week, we'll be exploring Set and Costume design and the role of a Theatre Designer. See you then!

Ella