

Teaching Materials to Write a One-Act Play
Write Your Way to Empathy

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Teacher's Note:

This compilation of material was created during an action research project where I sought to see how playwriting activities could help students build empathy. I narrowed down empathy to three attributes: The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect and The Imaginative Capacity. You will see these attributes as targets I was aiming at with each activity.

As with all creative ventures, there are millions of different ways to paint a painting or sing a song. There is no such a thing as a "right" answer when it comes to creativity. The only wrong answer is the one that never makes it on the page. These activities and graphic organizers are things that have worked for me in my classroom, but you should feel free to be artistic with them and adjust and modify them to your own needs, interests and specific desires for your students.

Playwriting Activity Cards

Reading Published Plays and Analyzing Complex Characters

Activity #1 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#): Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Activity Description:

1. Pick a meaty play to discuss! By building students' repertoire of theatre/literature, we give them more things that they can connect to and relate to. Some suggestions that have worked for me in my 9th grade Humanities classroom:

- Romeo & Juliet by William Shakespeare
- A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
- Twelve Angry Men by Reginald Rose
- Eurydice by Sarah Ruhl
- The Language Archive by Julia Cho

2. As a teacher, go through the play and write some thinking questions in the margins for discussion during the class. These questions should prompt students to make observations of the text and draw conclusions or conjure questions based on their observations. Some examples of thinking questions I've asked:

- What do you think this character wants in this moment?
- What do you think is beneath this text? What is the character saying that he or she isn't saying out loud?
- What are the conflicts that this character is experiencing?
- How does the setting influence the character's decision making?
- Who does this character remind you of in your own life? Why?

3. Read the play out loud in class and assign character roles to different students. Stop and start to discuss the play and the questions you have started. I encourage using the questions you have developed as jumping off points and letting the group as a whole guide the discussion--invite students to ask their own questions, and use their ideas and wonderings as the ultimate guide to the discussion, using your own plan as simply a springboard for their curiosities. Another idea is to read the play all the way through and set up a Socratic Seminar to discuss the characters in the play and the story the play told.

Student Reflection

One purpose that I see is that in a play, you're living someone else's experiences. It's helping you to take a brief look into someone else's life. In turn, that helps us as humans understand each other, understand connection. I remember the whole play [Romeo & Juliet] pretty well- I personally walked away with a feeling of astonishment. It was a long play that made me feel. It upset me. It made me angry. It also made me happy throughout different parts. As a writer, well, with writing my own play, I've thought back to some of the plays that we've read about how characters should interact, how they should share the same space and occupy this area even though it's fiction, but make it seem real, make it feel like it could happen, like it could be a thing.

Teacher Reflection

I constantly tell students that reading good work is an important key to writing good work. I especially love teaching Romeo & Juliet because I get to point out lots of theatrical conventions in the piece! I also enjoy the additional challenge of students interpreting Shakespearean language. For struggling readers, I have chosen the very accessible The Language Archive by Julia Cho because while the language is easier to understand, it is just as meaty and juicy in its content. I believe the questions that you develop as a teacher in this activity help determine how much empathy development is occurring. Please note that the questions I have suggested could apply to all plays, and they are not just comprehension questions (i.e. Where was Romeo when he met Juliet?). Rather, they are questions that ask students to observe and connect. You can also develop questions that ask students to imagine: "What do you think would happen if Rosalind liked Romeo?" "What if Romeo and Tybalt fought at the Capulet ball? Do you think that he and Juliet would have still fallen in love?"

What If? Activity

Activity #2 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Imaginative Capacity

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Activity Description:

1. Ask students to ask as many questions as they possibly can. Set a timer and ask them to write down as many “What if?” questions as they possibly can. The ideas can be silly, serious, dramatic, romantic, impossible.
2. Once the time is up, go around the room and share as many “What if?” questions as possible in a circle.
3. Ask students to then pick one or two questions that they will analyze a little more in depth. What kind of feelings does that question evoke? What kind of story could be told in the answering of this question?

Student Reflection: Rowan Straughan

I think this activity is pushing us to be creative. It's supposed to get our ideas for plays sparking. It's supposed to put us in thoughts and give us other people's ideas--spread ideas around. I got out of it, ideas from other kids, so I knew kind of what I wanted to do for my play.

Teacher Reflection

I always do this activity along with my students. I think the sharing is interesting because sometimes a student will ask a silly question that is a throw-away question for him/her and another student will hear it and take the question in a totally different direction. I also think the analyzing of the ideas must come separate from the brainstorming. Sometimes, students think too much and stop writing in the first part of the activity-- I think it's important to push students to create as much as possible in the first part. It is about quantity. The third part, where students go in and take a question or two and morph it and revise it is about quality.

Setting Brainstorm

Activity #3 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Imaginative Capacity

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Activity Description:

1. Ask students to list as many locations as they possibly can. Set a timer. (Note: For all of these activities, I have set the timer as little as 3 minutes and as much as 15 minutes depending on the activity that I am doing and the rate at which my students are writing.) The locations could be as specific or as broad as they would like them to be. The point is that they are putting as many ideas on paper!
2. Once the time is up, go around the room and share as many settings as possible in a circle.
3. Ask students to then pick one or two settings that they will analyze and then revise. What kind of feelings does this setting evoke? How can you write conflict into the setting? What kind of story could be told in this setting?

Student Reflection:

So, for the activity, we had to write different places that a play could have a setting at or any setting at all and we had to think about--or we had to write as many as possible within a certain amount of time. It's supposed to make us think of different creative ideas of places where our plays could take place. For me, it helped because it really made me think of different places we could do for a play. That's how I thought of--it made me think of doing something a little crazy like a second dimension kind of an idea. Some of the other settings I thought of were the beach, the school, my room, I think I did second dimension, a coffee shop, Hawaii, Times Square in New York. I ended up choosing second dimension because I thought it would be really interesting and really challenging and probably be different compared to a lot of people's.

Teacher Reflection

This is very similar to the What If? Activity. Some interesting things that have happened in the third part of the activity is that settings that don't have a lot of conflict in them when they're first written in the first part get conflict written into them. I've seen "Classroom" turn into "A classroom under school lock-down". I've seen "San Diego" turn into "San Diego as the San Andreas Fault is pulling California away from the United States".

Honest Emotion Anecdote Writing

Activity #4 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Activity Description:

1. What feelings do you truly, authentically understand? Invite students to list all the emotions that they feel they know. Set a timer.
2. Share the emotions out loud. List them on the board. Invite the students to list down some emotions that were shared that they also understand but did not list initially.
3. Ask students to pick one emotion and to write 2-3 anecdotes from their life that prove that they understand this emotion. Ask them to be as specific as possible. Their task is to prove to their reader that this emotion exists and that they have the life experiences to prove it.
4. Ask students to pick another emotion that they perceive to be the opposite of the emotion that they previously wrote anecdotes for. They are to write another 2-3 anecdotes from their life that prove that they understand this emotion. Ask them to be as specific as possible. Their task is to prove to their reader that this emotion exists and that they have the life experiences to prove it.

Student Reflection

I think it kind of helps with inspiration for the play. It helps the writer--it helps with the story so it flows well so it actually sounds like it could happen so you can relate to the story as opposed to talking a story I've never felt before. That's one reason the honest emotion is useful. I talked about being alone--like in middle school or elementary school or on the playground, I connected to that feeling. I don't know it showed that much in the beginning but it's evolved as I've written more. In class, it was surprising hearing people being comfortable and sharing and being open. It's something that I guess isn't that common in other schools--just to be open and have the space to share something personal.

Teacher Reflection

I have seen students share really deep, personal experiences with this exercise. I've also seen students share funny stories that prove that humor exists in the world. I think it's important to me to remind my students of the theatre masks during this exercise--drama is made of comedy and drama--not just one or the other. Invite them to explore all of it and not to push themselves into one side immediately.

FTF Statement

Activity #5 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Imaginative Capacity

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#): Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Activity Description:

1. Invite students to list as many stories in a “First, ... Then, ... Finally, ...” format. These can be as simple or as detailed as they’d like. The point is they write as many of them as possible.
2. Invite each student to share a few FTF Statements.
3. Repeat the process until each student has a variety of FTF Statements.
4. Invite students to pick an FTF statement to enhance and add detail to. Name the characters. Place them in a setting. Throw in some obstacles. Whatever they would like to add that still allows the statement to read in the simple FTF format, allow them to add it.

Student Reflection:

I think it's just the skeleton of the story. How it's going to progress. It's kind of like a chord progression in a song--that's what the FTF statement is. It's First, Then, Finally. I think writing a lot of them is supposed to open your mind... it's supposed to make you think of stories outside of the box, I think. I think if you try to think of a story straight on, you'll never get anything but if you think of the skeleton, and build on top of that, that's when you get a story that's outside of the box. I looked at the scenes and I saw what was happening in those different scenes and then I put them in words. In my FTF, First, one mobster finds out where his lost wife is, then he goes to the guy who stole his wife, then he reunites with his wife-- it might be a little confusing but I like how mine is back then--it's not in the 2000s like most of the people's plays. Mine is back in time. I like the show Sopranos, so I like how it's related to that show. That's where I got inspiration for the mobster view of it, but not the actual story. For the story, I got the inspiration from my mind, haha!

Teacher Reflection

Students who walk into writing a one-act play without completing this activity first have a lot of trouble getting to the end of their play. This is not to say that it is impossible to write a play without this, but this helps students streamline their stories and write with purpose--they know where they are headed in their writing if they do this activity first.

Objectives/Fears Improv

Activity #6 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#): Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Activity Description:

1. Theatre is an exploration of what we want and what we fear. Well developed characters are dynamic in that they are always chasing after an objective or running from a fear. First, set a timer and invite students to list as many objectives as they possibly can. These can be abstract or specific--everything from love to a bowl of nachos--as long as they are things that people could *want*.
2. Then, set a timer again and invite students to list as many fears as possible. These can be abstract or specific--everything from rejection to clowns--as long as they are things that people could *fear*.
3. Make two lists on the board and invite students to share their wants and fears.
4. Invite two students to come up. One of them will pick an objective from the list and take a few minutes to think up a character who would want this objective.
5. Student one's task is to get their objective from student two. Student two has to figure out what kind of character he or she is and he or she should throw obstacles in the way of student one from getting what he or she wanted. For example, if student one chose "Nachos" as the objective, student two could say, "But we are out of chips!" or "Actually, I'm on a diet so we really can't eat nachos" or whatever he or she can imagine. Student one should try as many tactics as possible to get student two to give them their objective.

Student Reflection

What I remember is that we had written about a character a week or two before and we had to, how I did it, is I took the role of this character and I thought out what would be interesting. What is something this person would want and something they would be afraid of? I remember I did a low-ranking mobster who had to get collection money for the boss or else he was toast! His want was to get the money and be held in high regard by the boss and his fear was failure and ultimately death. Before that activity, I wasn't--before this class, I wasn't really sure how to make a character, how to create a person, but activities--that activity and activities like it have helped me get a better view on what a character should be. A character should be someone who the audience could be attached to, someone relatable but not the same as you or me--someone who is separated by a barrier but we can go "Oh, I, I feel those emotions that you are feeling!" It's someone who is believable but with a veil of fiction.

Teacher Reflection

This is a nice introduction to writing dialogue with conflict. So often, without this, students default to writing what they see on television. Walking and talking is a convention on television that doesn't work as well on a stage. This activity helps students skip over the exposition and go straight to the heart of the conflict--which is always a character chasing after an objective or running from a fear.

Character Descriptions

Activity #7 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect, The Imaginative Capacity

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#): Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Activity Description:

1. Invite students to write descriptions of 2-3 characters. Set a timer that allows them to write for at least 5 minutes per character. When they ask what they're supposed to write, just invite them to write down whatever it is that would give us a clear picture of who this person is.
2. Share some of your character descriptions out loud. Have other students list questions they might have about that character based on the descriptions.
3. Go back and have them edit the character descriptions after having some discussion of what makes a dynamic character. What would give us a clearer picture of who this character is? How old is this person? What does this person want more than anything? How does this person speak? What quirks might this person have?

Student Reflection: Carson Stringer

Well, my way of viewing it as is kind of just so that when the actor gets the script or when someone gets the script, they're able to know whether they're embodying it or reading it or acting it out and so you kind of just know about the character, feel more connected. So with my characters, I did the ages, I kind of did who they were, what they wore, just to add to their character--so you can kind of get a grasp of what they would look like so if you put it in your head, you know what this person looks like and kind of what the setting is. I was able to make my characters by thinking of different personality types and thinking what this character would be and what they look like. How would the way they dress influence how they act and feel? So with King Salt, I added his age, 37--when I added the ages, I added them with the intention of adding the medieval aspect. The life expectancy was around 40...a little less, so he's kind of older for his time. In medieval times, people didn't live as long... just because of disease and different things going on. Some drastic things. I put that into consideration. His daughter was 17, so it means he had his daughter around 20 which is kind of late for the time period. With the different ages, I made sure they each contributed to the time period. The way they dress and their language too. I know that it wasn't exact but I wanted to also make it easy for people to understand. My theme is loneliness, so I wanted to add some aspects in there of what people like and what people don't like. He loves his daughter but he also can be a little bitter...he's flawed, kind of like everyone. I wanted to add that in there so that people could know he was like a real person almost. With Hollow, she's a little sassy. She's kind of afraid of her father. She has inner turmoil. She just wants to help her father. While she's disobeying him, she's trying to get him to feel better because she knows he's kind of driving himself into desperation. With Bracken, Salt's mentor, not much is known about him. Because he died. He was such a rude, mean king. Not people wanted to remember him. They kind of forgot about him as time went on. Bracken is kind of arrogant, very controlling. I wanted to make him kind of the antagonist a bit but some parts of his dialogue, you can see where he's coming from. You can see human aspects if you dig deep enough. You kind of see what influenced him to be that way in the end. That's the kind of the way I thought of my characters and put into consideration when making them.

Teacher Reflection

I think that this activity really stretches students' imaginations. You're asking students to build a full person from their imaginations and you're asking them to be able to answer all the questions about this character. They do this by connecting experiences they have had and stringing together observations they have made about the world. The only wrong answer is "I don't know".

Monologue Writing

Activity #8 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect, The Imaginative Capacity

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#): Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Activity Description:

1. Invite students to take a character that he or she has developed. They are to write from the perspective of this character, in first person.
2. Invite them to list down someone this character might talk to. It might be another character they have developed. It might be a stock character, like a mom or a best friend or a teacher.
3. You may use a variety of prompts here. Please feel free to come up with your own! You can ask them all to write, from their character's perspective. Here are some ideas:
 - What do you want most in the world and why?
 - What do you need to get rid of right now? Why?
 - Where in the world feels like home? How come?
 - What are you running from? Why?
 - Where are you going to be in five years? Why?
 - What is the funniest thing that's ever happened to you?
 - Who do you miss right now? Why?
4. Set a timer. They are to write from their character's perspective talking to their second character's perspective.
5. Share. Repeat the process and then have students pick one of their monologues to revise and edit.

Student Reflection:

A monologue helps with seeing how a character I guess, is on the inside and how they express themselves, what they think, what they feel. And, in a play and just writing it, it helps the character be able to get their thoughts and emotions out without being interrupted. I wanted to get across that my character kind of wasn't crazy per se but had some interesting beliefs about the universe and so this monologue allowed him to kind of stand up on a soap box and be able to say what he thought was the truth. I would be able to develop the character's voice and their personality.

Teacher Reflection

I always find myself asking students two questions during this activity: Where is the honesty in this monologue? and How is this character's voice unique and special and different from your own voice? These seem like paradoxical questions but they push many students' writing to such an interesting place and these interesting places vary from student to student.

Writing A One-Act Play

Activity #10 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect, The Imaginative Capacity

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#): Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Activity Description:

1. There is an organizer at the end of this packet that may help with this. Have students set up each scene with character descriptions, a setting description, and an “At rise” section. “At rise” is what is happening on the stage when the curtain opens.
2. Push students to tell story through dialogue. Steer them away from really descriptive narrative that is not occurring through dialogue. They can add this later if they so choose, but the story should be understandable through the characters’ words.

Student Reflection: Sol Manuel Garza

A good play is not only the result of interesting ideas but also an understanding of how to use dialogue to communicate those ideas. Listening to actors rehearse my script, I realized that I had to write in a way that would help the characters engage in actual conversations. Sometimes I had to change the wording of a line or insert/delete a stage direction to fit the moment. When you write a play, you have to think about what your play is going to look and sound like live. Another thing I have learned is that a good play affects people’s emotions, even if they don’t want it to happen, while not making the audience feel manipulated. Your play has to emotionally involve the audience. No matter how interesting your ideas may be, if the audience isn’t emotionally invested, it won’t be an interesting play. Try to stay away from cliché emotions and emotional reactions. We all know what real emotions look, sound and feel like. If you can recreate that in your play, it will be good.

Teacher Reflection

When students get stuck, I always ask them to go back to the FTF Statement. Get yourself a clear picture of what is supposed to happen, and then you can make it happen. If the writing feels stilted or students aren’t liking what they are writing, I invite them to go back to their Honest Emotion writing and to really use the emotions they truly understand to drive the writing that they are doing.

Reading Works In Progress

Activity #10 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#): Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

Activity Description:

1. Make copies of each students' play and pass them out, or project the plays on the board.
2. Invite the playwright of each play to choose which students read for which character. The playwright should *not* read their own play out loud. Their job is to listen to their work and to listen to where their piece is working or where their writing isn't being read as they intended so they can go back and work those moments later.
3. Ask students to write down their initial reactions to the play. You may choose to write some thinking questions on the board: What themes do you see in this play? What do you think the author wanted you to feel? Why? How do you know that? Does the structure of the play help or hinder the story?
4. This reading activity should be followed with the Pops/Questions/What if? Critique process.

Student Reflection:

It's an interesting experience because I enjoy hearing my plays come to life but it's also kind of uncomfortable because they interpret things that aren't how I intended it to be like they laugh at a part that wasn't meant to be funny. I write a lot of love plays, love stories. Every time it should be a serious "Oh my gosh I love you", they're like "Obhh I love you babe." It's kind of both. I enjoy hearing my play come to life and imagine it actually happening. I know we have to be quiet, but I know it's kind of nice because it's putting me in the world, putting me in the background and seeing it happen. Sometimes, I'll laugh because it's uncomfortable a little bit. Like "in my head I'm like "Oh my gosh that's not what I meant" but most of the time it's not that difficult because it's my work and I'm just trying to experience it.

Teacher Reflection

This can be really uncomfortable for students during moments but for the majority of this process, students seem to be experiencing a really wonderful thing--their work come to life through other people's voices! I typically read the stage directions when I do this with students, and I enjoy watching the playwright listen to his or her own work.

Pops/Questions/What If? Critique Session

Activity #11 of 11

Empathy Targets:

The Art of Observation, The Ability to Connect, The Imaginative Capacity

9th/10th Grade Common Core Literacy Standards Addressed in This Activity:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#): Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Activity Description:

1. As students hear their works out loud, ask the readers and other students in the classroom to jot down the things that “Pop” out to them--these are things that moved them, stood out to them as good/effective.
2. Students should also jot down any questions they have about the play's characters or storyline. These should be questions that they are actually wondering that the author probably has answers to or should have answers to. These questions help students reveal to one another the holes in their own plot lines and stories so that they can go back and fix them.
3. Students, finally, should jot down “What if?” questions. This is a chance to throw out some specific critique like, “What if the character descriptions were more detailed?” or “What if there were clearer stage directions?” but it is also a chance for each critique participant to ask the crazy what if questions that were sparked in their own writer's mind--“What if the character was really afraid of clowns and this is why he wouldn't go to the circus?” “What if this instead took place on Mars?”

Student Reflection

What happens with Pops/Questions/What If? is it gives you feedback and imagination. It makes you ask questions if you don't get some parts and what I think it's for--Pops: it's for normal like warm feedback. Questions: Typical questions, like “Oh what happened to the guy? Does he really have to do that?” What Ifs are for your own imagination--what would you want to see? Like if it's a romance, and you want to see a serial killer or something--it's kind of giving your ideas to the writer. When they gave me Pops, I thought they liked this and this--then they asked me questions like: “Why did it have to be a dream” and “Why did they date?” and stuff. For the What Ifs, I liked how everybody gave me random things because they gave me imagination--I could add this, this and this to my play. Some people gave exaggerated things and so I was like I'm not going to do that. It's helpful to get feedback and hear your play because there might be some things that could be really useful for your play. So it's really helpful because you have peers catching your errors when you don't see your errors so I think it's really helpful.

Teacher Reflection

I find these three categories to be very useful during play critique! They help us start out with warm feedback and move into a more critical analysis of the work.

Assorted Graphic Organizers

CREATE DESCRIPTIONS FOR 5 CHARACTERS OF YOUR IMAGINING:

<i>Character's Name</i>	<i>Description of Physical Characteristics</i>	<i>What this character wants most and why?</i>	<i>What this character is afraid of and why?</i>

Questions for Analyzing Characters While Reading Plays

Common Core Standards Addressed in This Section

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

1. Which character seemed to be the most complex? Why?

2. Which character was the least complex? Why?

3. How did the characters interact with one another at the beginning of the play? Was this different by the end of the play? If so, how?

4. What do you think the *theme* of the play was? What lessons are learned through this piece of dramatic writing?

The One-Liner Play Page

Here are the plays you watched in one line:

Write 20 play ideas in one line. Highlight your favorite 5. Circle your absolute favorite.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

First, Then, Finally

Common Core Standards Addressed in This Section

9-10.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

MY TURN TO IMAGINE:

You are going to write a brief three scene play, but first you have to outline five ideas...

A PERFECT HOME:

First, two country rats lose their home and go searching for a new one.

Then, they find a home but are run out by a rude city guy.

Finally, they find a home in a junkyard with another country rat.

FAIRY TALE:

First, this guy thinks he can get his girl back by imagining her as a fairy tale.

Then, the fairy tale characters begin to rebel and turn against him.

Finally, the guy realizes he was kind of a jerk and apologizes.

You know... you get the idea! These First, Then and Finally's become your play. I encourage you to LET YOUR IMAGINATION RUN WILD! Try to steer away from cliches... show us something we haven't seen before! (Believe it or not, one of my favorite plays I've ever read by a student was a 4th grader who wrote a play between some yogurt and some yogurt cups).

My play title _____:

First, _____

Then, _____

Finally, _____

My play title _____:

First, _____

Then, _____

Finally, _____

My play title _____:

First, _____

Then, _____

Finally, _____

My play title _____:

First, _____

Then, _____

Finally, _____

My play title _____:

First, _____
Then, _____
Finally, _____

3-Scene, One-Act Play Outline

Your turn to imagine. The following pages are scene out lines for three scenes. You can do it! You have some limitations...

1. It's only 3 scenes, so pick something manageable.

2. Let your imagination run wild! Try not to write cliches or stories we have already heard... maybe find connections to your own life and what's interesting in your life. This one student I taught loved to eat and wrote a play about a taco talking to a hamburger. It ended up being a beautiful metaphor for people of different cultures getting along.

3. You can write TWO or THREE characters... but no more, no less. You want to practice developing good characters this first go around, and it's hard to do that in such a short amount of space if you are trying to develop like 10 characters in 10 pages.

4. Remember it's not film. When you put us in a setting, we stay in that setting for quite a bit of time! We can't just go back and forth.

5. Have fun!

Title of Play: _____

by: _____

Scene 1

Characters (limit yourself to two or three characters for this entire piece):

Name and Description

Name and Description

Name and Description

Setting Description (your setting can change each scene... but once you're in a scene, EVERYTHING that is going to happen is going to happen in this ONE place... it's not television!)

At Rise (this is where you list what the character/s are doing when the lights come up or the curtains open... what's already happening?):

(Now your characters start talking!)

(character name goes here -->) _____

(Dialogue goes here)

(then another character speaks) _____

(character name goes here) _____

(got it?) _____

(alright... I'm going to let go of your hand now!) _____

Blank lined paper with horizontal ruling lines and a central margin line.

Blank lined paper with horizontal lines and a central margin line.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 12 sets of horizontal lines. Each set includes a top line, a middle line, and a bottom line, with a dashed midline for letter height guidance.

End of Play

Name _____

Play Title _____

Playwright's Name _____

Critique Session

<p>POPS! <i>What stands out to you as good about this piece? What is effective? What is the writer doing well?</i></p>	
<p>QUESTIONS <i>What questions were left unanswered? What things do you think you needed to know to fully understand and appreciate this piece? What holes are there in the plot/story?</i></p>	
<p>WHAT IF?s <i>What could the writer do to improve this story? What radical changes do you have in mind that might move this story in an interesting direction?</i></p>	