

Understanding Conflict: a playwriting warm-up

by Morgan Gould



STEP 1

Find three hats or buckets or containers. In one container, place a bunch of folded-up pieces of paper with settings written on them. “A funeral,” “New York City,” “The Living Room,”—get creative! In the second container, place folded-up papers with two characters on them (preferably characters who have a relationship, i.e. mother/daughter, father/son, two best friends, a student and a teacher, etc). In the third container, place folded-up pieces of paper with a single line of dialogue written on them. The line should contain conflict (so that the scene will!). “Get out of here!” or “You would say that!” or “I hate you! I hate you so much!” are some examples.

STEP 2

Pair your students up (or you can do it as an individual exercise). Have each student or pair draw one slip of paper from each bucket. Now they have a character pair, a setting, and a line.

STEP 3

Set the timer for 3 minutes. Tell them to brainstorm/ focus on what CONFLICT could happen between these two people in this location. Make a list of issues that could arise.

STEP 4

When the 3 minutes are up, set the timer for 60 seconds. Tell them to choose one conflict.

STEP 5

When they've chosen a conflict, set the timer for 10 minutes. Tell them they need to write a 10-line exchange (each character talks 5 times) that includes the setting, characters, and the line they've been given.

STEP 6

Let them share it! Point out how conflict is the generating force behind the scenes. Help them draw the conclusion that all plays/scenes are rooted in two opposing needs or forces. Use examples from plays or books you've read in class.

Morgan Gould is a New York City based playwright, director, producer and theater professional specializing in licensing and the creation and representation of adaptations for the stage. She's done residencies and directed work at theaters including Ensemble Studio Theatre, New Georges, Brooklyn Arts Exchange, Ars Nova, HERE Arts Center and Playwrights Horizons. She holds a B.A. in Directing from Fordham University and an M.F.A. in Playwriting from CUNY Brooklyn. Her plays for schools have been performed across the nation.



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