

# Teacher's Introduction to The Playwright Pack

All pupils at KS3 now have to have experience of writing plays. That may seem a tough demand, but having spent twenty years encouraging secondary pupils of all ages and abilities to write plays I assure you that it's not only possible, but fruitful and enjoyable.

## Models

You do need suitable models. If your notion of 'a play' is a complete two-hour script for adult performers, then the going will be tough. Syllabus pressures, let alone teenage attention spans, won't let you take on something of that length. It's quite possible to dig out five-minute extracts from "Macbeth" or "The Crucible", but in isolation those bits won't deliver what's going on in the play as a whole. TV is the obvious accessible model, but TV scripts aren't the same as play scripts, and while you may also want to teach the art of TV drama, reading through a TV script won't teach what you need to cover about plays.

In my view you should be thinking about a purpose-built five minute drama script, for four or five characters. In its final form this will be written, although the route towards developing that may well include improvisation and group discussion, as well as individual writing.

## An Ideal Pattern

If you want a printed version, my collection 'Looking at the Moon' (CUP), includes five such plays, as does 'Ten Short and Comic Scripts' (ZigZag Education) which contains two very different sets of short plays – five of them very short and five comic. My ideal pattern would be two rounds of drama festivals. In the first, small groups each tackle a different script, prepare and rehearse it, and then perform it to each other. These performances are discussed, and pupils write comments on the plays, before each of the pupils writes their own.

Some time later, in the second round, groups carry out the same routine, using four or five of their own scripts (selected and duplicated by their saintly teacher). That way they approach the form from a variety of angles - as actor, director, reader and critic - and quickly develop a sense of its variety and possibilities.

## Back in the Real World...

But I developed that pattern a long time ago, when teachers were trusted to find their own approaches, and had the time in which to explore them. Teachers today don't have that luxury, so you may well need a quick, accessible way of tackling play-writing in short bursts, while not baffling or frustrating your pupils.

*The Playwright Pack* is offered as a solution to that problem. Because of the pressures, it offers only a handful of sheets, but each of these can be used in a variety of ways - see my 'Notes' for some of the possibilities, but only after you've had the chance to consider possible approaches for yourself. This kind of work does develop a momentum of its own, so my guess is that as you tackle some of these assignments, and see how pupils react, that those reactions will in turn suggest further ways forward. Have fun.