

INTRODUCTION

Fiction, Poetry, Drama...within the trinity of literature, plays have always occupied the lowest pedestal. In terms of lesson time, writing plays hardly featured, and never equalled the importance accorded to writing stories and poems. Where drama was valued, it was often improvised, and while that activity has its own substantial rationale, a stress on improvisation could also amount to a devaluation of playwriting.

All KS3 pupils are now required to have the experience of writing plays, but exactly how that should happen is not clearly spelt out. What are the models to be? When a teacher says 'play' to their KS3 classes, what do the pupils have in mind? A TV script, or a school trip to a Shakespeare production? And are those the models pupils have in mind when they begin to write?

There isn't the lesson time in which to encourage pupils to write two-hour plays. They need limited short-term models, examples of how play-writing can be done which match the limits within which they are going to work – small casts, five or ten minutes in length. Those may sound insulting, until you try to explore them, but it's my belief that it's possible to combine variety, literary sophistication and intellectual demands within such a form.

Five Short Plays deliberately offers a range of models. Plays should be acted as well as read, and people writing plays should think about them in terms of actability – gestures and movement, stage space, groupings of character, development and changes of tone.

My ideal use of this collection, therefore, would be for the class to be divided into five groups. In the first lesson, these groups are set up, and each group is allocated one of these plays. They rehearse a prepared reading of it, which is then presented back during the next lesson, in an instant drama festival. From pupils' notes and teacher comments, possible ideas and techniques are collected, which form the basis on which individual pupils subsequently write their own plays.

That's one approach. But there are others, and some teachers may prefer to look in detail at one play with the whole class – and maybe tackle another play a year later. Or pupils could work more intensively in groups at the process of planning a play: choosing groups of characters, or thinking in advance about the development of scenes. There are materials to support this process in *The Playwright's Activity Pack* (also published by ZigZag Education).

You, as teacher, have to decide the approach. But you will need short, accessible models of what a play looks like, and that is what this pack supplies. Each play covers two sides of A4, is photocopiable and ready for immediate use. Following this page are two pages of suggestions, on staging and on play-writing, for the first five 5-minute plays.

The second set of five short comic plays have been written to be enjoyable to read. That's their main function, and it's quite possible for secondary pupils of all ages and abilities to simply read them and then move on. Other possibilities include acting them out, using them as items in an assembly or varied programme of entertainment, or as models for pupils to use in writing their own scripts.

As usual, and rightly, it must be for you to select the approaches that suit you and your pupils. Have fun.

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