

CHARACTER CREATION: MOVING FROM ACTION TO MONOLOGUE

by Lindsay Price



This is a great starter playwriting exercise. Students move from creating physical and vocal attributes for a character to writing a monologue for that character. It shows students the details that go into creating an interesting dynamic character – in action and in writing.

Outline

Students will choose and develop a non-human character. In groups, students create a tableau showing the physical attributes of their character. Students then create a group scene, focusing on the physical and vocal aspects of their character. Students write down specific background details for their character such as where they came from, how they ended up in their location, a secret. Finally, students write a first person monologue.

The Exercise

- ❖ **Students form small groups (3-4).**
- ❖ **Their first task is to choose a household location;** a place where it makes sense that a group of inanimate objects would gather. Give a choice of three locations so the eventual scenes aren't all the same: basement, garage, kitchen cupboard, refrigerator,

cleaning closet, bookshelf, desk drawer, clothes closet, medicine chest.

- ❖ **Each student chooses an object in their location.** e.g. Desk drawer: Tape dispenser, pencil, dictionary.
- ❖ **Each student chooses a human emotion for their object.** How do they feel about being in their location? e.g. In one particular desk drawer group, the tape dispenser was sad because she'd rather be out on the desk watching the room, the dictionary was happy because she was smart and she was away from her archenemy the encyclopedia, and the pencil was oblivious because his eraser has been bitten off and that's where his brain was...
- ❖ **Each group creates a tableau.** Focus on the physical nature of the object, and at the same time showing the human emotion they've given their character. Present the tableaux to the rest of the class. The audience should be able to guess the object and the emotion.
- ❖ **Each group creates a short scene – a moment in the life.** What happens in that particular location? Is this the first time the objects have met each other? How do they feel about each other? e.g. In another desk drawer scene (made up of an eraser, ruler, and highlighter) the ruler was so happy helping humans keep straight that she had made up a song that she sang all

Continued Over...



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The Fine Print

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the time. This caused the eraser to complain bitterly because she hated humans for continuing to erase her. As the groups work on their scenes, encourage students to maintain the physicality of the character while giving them voice. What does the eraser sound like? How would they move, if they could?

❖ **Each group presents the scenes.**

Now, students move to the writing.

❖ **First, each student writes out some character details:**

- ▶ Name, age, physical attributes.
- ▶ Where did they come from?
- ▶ Do they have family? Who are they?
- ▶ Memories: First memory & favourite memory.
- ▶ Something they love to do.
- ▶ Something they hate.
- ▶ A secret.
- ▶ A secret they know about someone else in their location.

❖ **With everything they know about their character, students write a first person monologue.** Make sure students are familiar with the term monologue! Be clear that this is not a story, or a conversation. The character is speaking and sharing in their own voice. They should be speaking to a specific individual (such as one of

the other characters in their scene, or a family member). The subject of the monologue can be inspired from one of the just created details, or something else entirely – so long as the work gone into the character so far is clear.

❖ **Share the monologues with the group.**

The aim of the exercise is to de-mystify character development and monologue writing for the beginner playwright. All students can write a play! 🎭