

Writing Scripts

Drama Genre Mini-Unit

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Target Age Group: 4, 5, 6 grades

Lesson time: About 45 minutes per day

Utah CORE Standards:

Standard 8:1:a) Generate ideas for writing by reading, discussing, researching, and reflecting on personal experiences.

Standard 8:2:c) Compose a written draft using strong verbs and precise and vivid language to convey meaning.

Standard 8:6:d) Write in different forms and genres (e.g., essays, editorials speeches, TV scripts, responses to various media).

Materials Needed:

Peanuts comic strips

Reader's Theater scripts

Goldilocks and the Three Hares by Heidi Petach. Published by Scholastic Inc., 1998. (Or an alternative favorite picture book of your class)

Several sample plays (examples: "The Case of the Runaway Appetite: A Joe Giles Mystery" by Rob Hales, published in Houghton Mifflin Reading: Expeditions, Houghton Mifflin, 2001; "Mexicali Soup" adapted from a story by Kathryn Hitte and William D. Hayes, and "The Magic Bookshelf" by Patricia Clapp, in Never a Worm This Long, D.C. Heath and Company, 1989.

Frankenstein audio clip and script

Useful Resources:

Theatre of the Mind: Writing and Producing Radio Dramas in the Classroom by Don Kisner.

Revised Edition, Balance Publishing Company, 2003. Available at

www.balancepublishing.com

Reader's Theater scripts by Aaron Shepard. Available at <http://www.aaronsherp.com/rt/RTE.html>

Adventures in Old-Time Radio: Frankenstein. Released by Radio Spirits, 2001. Available at

www.radiospirits.com

Vocabulary/Terms to Teach:

Play: the stage representation of an action or story

Script: the written text of a play or broadcast

Act: one of the main divisions of an act

Scene: where, when, and the surrounding environmental details where the current action in the play takes place

Characters: the people in the play

Narrator: a character who tells part of the story line, but does not act in the play

Dialogue: when characters are speaking

Stage Directions: a description of what needs to be acted or directions for the crew

Day 1: Exploring Scripts

1. Give each student a script for a play, “Frankenstein“ script, and a reader’s theater script. As a class, discuss how their appearances are different from a story’s.
2. **Explain** that a script is how we write when we want our story to be performed for others to enjoy. It looks different to make it easier to be performed.
3. **Explain** the important features of a script:
 - Characters listed at the beginning
 - Setting explains when, where, and other environmental details
 - Dialogue is not in quotations
 - Actions/Stage directions are written in italics in parentheses
 - Narrator describes what is going on
4. Help the **students identify** these features in the play in front of them.
5. Hand out the script for “Frankenstein.” **Identify** the features found in the script. Read through the script together.
6. Before listening to the performance of “Frankenstein,” tell students to listen for ways that the script is different from the performance. Play the audio clip. Afterward, **discuss** their observations. Some observations they may note might be that the script makes it easy to know when it is your character’s turn to talk, actors can change the words and add pauses to their parts, the actors bring in emotions that aren’t written into the script, and hearing it performed changes the visualization from what we had when we just read it.

Explain how this adds to a script because it lets other people add their voice and interpretation to the work.

Extension Activity: “Frankenstein” was written as a radio play. If we were to change it to a movie clip, as a class, decide what additional stage directions you would add.
7. Read through a play of your choice, assigning roles. Encourage students to perform their parts with voice. You may assign more than one student to a role to increase participation.

Assess if students understand the terms used in script-writing by questioning as they read through the play.

Day 2: Experimenting with Script-Writing

1. Hand out a Reader’s Theater piece. Review the terms, having students identify the features of a script, and re-teach as necessary.
2. Perform the Reader’s Theater together.
3. Explain that today we will begin writing scripts. Just like in a story, a script needs to be planned out. Instead of storyboarding, we’re going to start by using a story we already know, and try to change it into a script, as if we were going to turn it into a movie.
4. Review/Reread the picture book, Goldilocks and the Three Hares.
5. Using an overhead of the “Basic Script Outline,” model changing the story into a script. As you begin transforming the story into a script, remind the students that all a script needs is the actions and the dialogue. Some things might be left out. In Goldilocks and the Three Hares, the dialogue is all in the speech bubbles, which makes it easy to transfer to a script.
6. Transfer 3-4 pages into a script form. After modeling 3-4 lines of dialogue using think-aloud

strategies, begin involving the students and have them guide the script.

7. Transfer a comic strip into a script. Use the **model** Peanuts strip.
8. Together, write another script as a class.
9. In small groups: give each group a comic strip. Have them write a script for it. After they finish writing, have each group share their script by either reading it or acting it out. **Assess** their understanding of the form of scripts through their group-produced scripts and their performances.

Days 3-6+: Writing Scripts

For the next days, use a writer's workshop format, beginning with a mini-lesson (10-15 minutes), then allowing students to work on their own individual pieces. Several mini-lessons are listed below. Choose the ones that most appropriately meet your class' needs. As students work individually, the teacher should conference with each student to assess their understanding of the form of script-writing and their writing skills in general.

Peers may also conference with each other to get additional support. Some questions that might be used to help guide the peer conferences are: 1) Is the script well-organized with a clear beginning, middle, and end for the story? 2) Is the scene clearly stated, listing where, when, and other important bits of information the reader needs to understand? 3) Are stage directions clear and brief? 4) Does the dialogue help move the story forward?

Some students might require additional support or extension activities. A few ideas are listed below.

Additional Supports/Structure:

- Have students storyboard their script before they begin writing.
- Provide students with a Basic Script Outline.
- Allow students to retell a favorite story or book.
- Provide extra practice by having students do extra comic strips.

Extension Activities:

- Allow students to produce their finished scripts and either perform for the class or video-tape them.
- Encourage students to explore concepts such as mood, monologue, and character foils. Help them to develop these in their own piece.

Mini-Lesson: Setting a Scene--Mood

Explain that mood is how you feel when you read or perform a piece. Setting the right scene is critical so that the actors will know how to perform your piece. Hold up several picture books. Have the students describe the feelings that specific pictures give them, such as happy, angry, scary, or fun.

Replay the "Frankenstein" clip and hand out the scripts. Have the students identify the mood of "Frankenstein." Together, identify words in the script that help develop that mood.

Have students start to brainstorm what they could add to their own pieces to help develop the mood of their individual pieces. Encourage them to add these details to their scripts today.

Mini-lesson: Present Tense

Explain that scripts are written in present-tense because they are happening ‘right now,’ in the instant that they are being performed.

Using some common verbs, such as run, jump, yell, or walk, show the students the past, present and future tense. Then, provide a couple of verbs, such as bought, whisper, or throw, and have the students tell you the present-tense.

Together, change lines from either a story you’ve written, or the sample ones below, into present-tense in script form.

Examples:

Bobby opened the window. *changes to* (Bobby opens the window.)

“You get out of here!” Fred yelled at the dog. FRED: (yelling) You get out of here!

The tree crashed to the ground. (The tree falls down. Crashing noises.)

Gwen said, “I hoped you would come to my party!” GWEN: I hoped you would come to my party!

Encourage students to use present-tense as they work on their pieces for the day.

Mini-Lesson: Sound Effects and Special Effects

Review what stage directions are. Explain that one type of action that we want to add to our scripts are sound effects and special effects. These let the actors ‘see’ what is going on around them as they read the script.

Complete the “Frankenstein” extension activity from Day 1, or use a movie clip or trailer of an action scene (such as 2-3 min. of the fight scene in *Transformers*). Have students identify special effects that they see and hear. Explain that without the special effects, the script would just say, “OPTIMUS PRIME and MEGATRON fight.” But there is much more to the scene than that.

Write “CLASS listens to TEACHER.” on the board. Have the students list other sounds they can hear which would add to this scene. (Examples: A pencil taps, a bell rings, girls giggle, Tommy snores.)

Have them think about the setting for their stories. What sounds might be important to add? What special effects would help tell the story better?

Encourage students to add these to their pieces as they work today.

Mini-Lesson: Narrators

Review that narrators speak but don't act.

Explain that they serve two important roles: they help move the story forward by bridging the gaps between scenes and acts, and they help the audience know what is going on. Not every script needs a narrator, but many scripts use them today, even in the movies.

Model an example of this by showing a movie or commercial clip with a voice-over. (One example is the beginning of *While You Were Sleeping*, starring Sandra Bullock.) Discuss how having the narrator helped the story to get started and go faster than if every part was acted out or spoken by different individuals.

Also discuss how narrators should be used sparingly. Their purpose is to get information to the audience quickly. If they are talking a lot, then maybe the piece would be better-written as a short-story instead of a script.

If needed, to explain how a narrator bridges between scenes, use Goldilocks and the Three Hares by Heidi Petach. Go through the book and discuss when would be a good time for the narrator to jump in, and how sometimes the characters can be their own narrators by thinking out-loud what is going through their brain.

Together, discuss how a narrator might be helpful in their own story. Encourage them to use that, if needed, in their individual pieces.



Model Comic Strip

Title: Blackmail by Snoopy

Characters:

Linus

Snoopy

Setting: *Linus' house. Linus is writing a letter while Snoopy watches.*

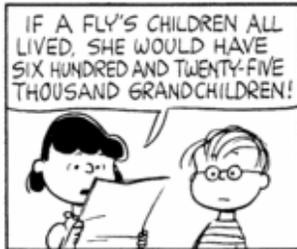
LINUS: (*writing*) I would like to recommend Snoopy for Neighborhood Dog of the Year. He is truly a dog among dogs.

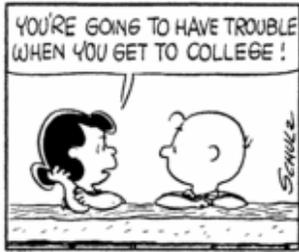
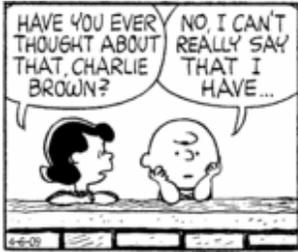
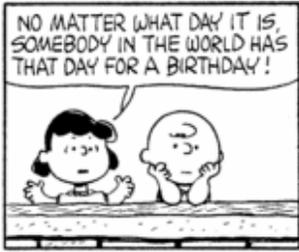
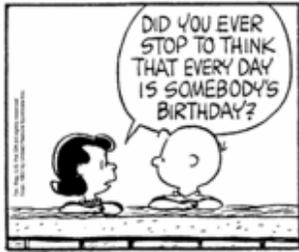
(*turning to Snoopy*) How's that?

SNOOPY: Great! (*Snoopy gives Linus his blanket.*)

LINUS: What a way to get your blanket back!

SNOOPY: What a way to get a letter of recommendation!





Basic Script Outline

Title: _____

Characters:

Setting: _____

FRANKENSTEIN

By Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, adapted for radio by Antony Ellis (06/07/1955)

Characters

DR. VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

HENRY (Victor's friend)

ELIZABETH (Victor's cousin & girlfriend)

Setting: Henry's house, on the back porch, late in the evening.

Prior to this scene, Dr. Frankenstein created a monster. When his monster starts destroying things and killing people, Dr. Frankenstein runs away to England, hoping to leave the evil monster behind him.

ELIZABETH: (*screaming*) Victor! Victor!

VICTOR: We're out here, Beth.

ELIZABETH: Oh I've just had a horrible experience. Darling, I'm so glad to see you!

VICTOR: You're pale, Beth. Sit down right here next to me.

HENRY: Oh, what happened, Beth?

ELIZABETH: I was . . . I was walking in the woods not far from here when I looked up and saw . . . and saw a man . . . sort of a man standing over me.

HENRY: Well men aren't so bad, that is if you happen to know the right ones, and you do.

ELIZABETH: I'm not joshing, Henry. He was not exactly a man. He was twice the height of anyone I'd ever seen. And his skin looked like dried parchment. It's incredible, but I think I've seen a monster.

HENRY: Monster?

ELIZABETH: Yes, I . . . I ran away. He didn't follow me; just, just stared after me. Watching me. You do believe me, don't you?

HENRY: A monster stared after you?

ELIZABETH: Oh, look, look! Henry, Victor, through the trees right out there! Look! There he is again!

(*wind blowing*)

VICTOR: (*narrating*) Yes, the monster stood there silhouetted against the trees. The monster which I had created, standing like an evil blot of flesh and blood, moved in the darkening

twilight, and then suddenly, phantom-like, it disappeared. Beth and Henry both watched me as I started from the piazza after the disappearing creature in the back woods.

As I drew near to the heavily-wooded section, giant footprints in the soft mud about me showed the path ahead. The sun was sinking in the west, and the last orange pinpoints of light needled my flesh until every sense within me was tingling with the expectation of seeing my living horror.

Then I realized I was unarmed. Every crooked tree, each twisted branch which obstructed my path appeared to be his form.

(branch snaps)

I heard the crackling of a branch and the moving of a form on the velvet moss.

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER: I thought you'd come, Creator.

VICTOR: You!

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER: Are you frightened, Creator?

VICTOR: You dare talk to me!

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER: Please don't turn away from me. Please.

VICTOR: Let me go!

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER: Please. I mean no harm to you. Listen to me, Victor
Frankenstein. You must listen to me. You created me. You owe me that much.

VICTOR: I owe you nothing, murderer!

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER: Why am I a murderer? Because you created a form so
horrible, a face so distorted that no man can look upon me and call me friend. I'm an
outcast. You can save me.