**WE ALL TELL STORIES**

**Stories are the way we present ourselves: what we’ve experienced; what we’ve imagined; what we find funny; what we find sad; what we dream about; what we’ve been told that we think is worth repeating.**

**There is hardly a day that goes by that we haven’t told a story to someone or told one to ourself.**

**A play is simply the telling of that story as we see it in our mind’s eye, without narration, but through the actions and words of the individuals and creatures involved.**

**Once again, Pendragon’s Young Playwrights Festival is asking Middle and High School students to tell a story in the form of a one-act play.**

**Here are the guidelines:**

**PENDRAGON YOUNG PLAYWRIGHTS’ FESTIVAL**

**Middle School Students– a traditional style ten-minute play**

**High School Students – a traditional style ten-minute play**

**REQUIREMENTS: Entries should be producible 10 minute plays, up to ten pages in length (no smaller than ten-point font) and require no more than 4 actors, although those actors may play more than one character.**

**Submissions longer than 10 pages or that require more than 4 actors will be disqualified.**

**JUDGING AND AWARDS**

**Plays will be read by a panel of Pendragon judges. The judges will choose a winner and a runner up in each category. The winning plays will be fully performed at the festival, and runner up plays will be read onstage.  The authors of the winning plays are invited to participate in all aspects of the staging of their play, from auditions to final dress rehearsals. All students who submit a play will be invited to attend the day of the event.**

A good ten-minute play is not a sketch or an extended gag, but rather a complete, compact play, with a beginning, middle and end. It typically takes place in one scene and runs no more than ten pages.

It focuses on **one main action or problem**; there's not time to get into complicated layers of plot. And for **practical reasons**, it's a good idea to **keep your play to one set and as few** [**scenes**](http://www.playwriting101.com/glossary#scene) **as possible**. Why? Two or more distinct [settings](http://www.playwriting101.com/glossary#setting) requires a set change in the middle of an already short play. Not a good thing.

So the moral of the story is to write your one-act with the most minimal set and [technical demands](http://www.playwriting101.com/glossary#technical-demands) possible.

**Theatricality:** Plays are inherently different than film or television scripts. What makes your play theatrical? Remember: it will be performed live on stage in front of an audience. A play is also different than a short story or novel: in a play, the story can be revealed through action, rather than narration. What makes your play active?

**A Few Helpful Hints**

**tips useful as you imagine, write and revise.**

**Remember, though: these are only tips. Suggestions. That’s it. Not rules. When it comes to the world of your play, you get to pick the limits and laws of the universe. You’re the playwright—that means you’re in charge.**

**So: Maybe the laws of gravity don’t apply to your hero. Maybe your play takes place at the very beginning of time, or the very end. Your characters might be average, everyday people living in Kentucky at the present moment, right now. Or they might be two-hundred-year-old Argentine ghosts. Or carpenter ants. Or hallucinations, or elephants, or zombies, or trees, or talking paper clips. You decide.**

**A few guiding principles to get you started. But after that, go crazy. Have fun. Make a mess. Scare someone silly, crack the crowd up laughing, or leave them scratching their heads. The only limits are the borders of your own imagination. We can’t wait to see what you come up with.**

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

1. **What’s your problem?!**

**There should be some sort of conflict at the heart of your play. In a ten-minute play especially, it’s important to introduce the conflict quickly (EXPOSITION)—within the first three pages, probably—so there’s plenty of time to develop, explore and finally resolve it. (For instance: Two monsters both want to eat the same giant cheeseburger billboard. Neither is willing to share. The purple monster called dibs, but the green monster has bigger claws… )**

**Setting: Where does the play take place? When? What year? What time of day? Is it hot outside? Snowing? What does it smell like? How does the setting help you tell your story?**

1. **Whaddya want?**

**Your characters—whether human, zombie, or superhero—should be guided by strong, clear motivations. What do they want? What’s at stake for them right now: what do they stand to lose or gain? What choices do they have to make? What obstacles do they face? Do they change during the play? How? Why?**

**It’s interesting to explore how competing motivations (INCITING ACTION - COMPLICATIONS) affect the way two or more characters relate to one another. What happens onstage when characters want different things?**

**Character: Who are the characters that populate your play? How old are they? Where are they from? What kind of mood are they in today? And how is character revealed in your play? Through language? Mannerism? Action? Dress?**

1. **Tick, tick, tick…**

**You also need an internal “clock”: something built into the architecture of your play that creates a sense of urgency, pressure, or drive. Why must this conflict be dealt with right now? An effective internal clock will give your play the momentum it needs to hook an audience. For instance: A jewel thief breaks into the city museum and trips a silent alarm. The police will arrive in six and a half minutes. The clock is ticking: the jewel thief has just six and a half minutes to pull off the heist. If she takes too long, she’ll be caught.**

**The “clock” doesn’t have to be literal. How about this: Mary, Peter and John are having dinner in a fancy restaurant. When Peter excuses himself to use the restroom, John confesses his love to Mary—but Mary’s dating Peter! And he’ll be back from the bathroom any minute now. The imminence of Peter’s return gives John and Mary’s conversation an extra charge.**

1. **…BOOM!**

**The play should build toward a climax: (CRISIS AND CATASTROPHE) an eruption, a boiling point, a moment when everything comes to a head. A defendant in a criminal trial, having emphatically insisted on his innocence, finally buckles under the pressure of interrogation, leaps from the bench and admits his guilt! And nothing will ever be the same…**

1. **Life on the other side.**

**Guide your play toward a resolution. (DENOUEMENT) After the climax, what has changed? Does a conflict get solved? Is a misunderstanding corrected? Or maybe things become even more complicated? Perhaps old friends become mortal enemies. The choice is yours. But remember: Even if your audience doesn’t know it, the whole play is leading someplace from the very first line. Know the conclusion you’re writing toward, so you can construct the play to get there.**

**STORY AND CONCLUSION - A** story is a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence — it simply tells us what happened and in what order. It is the time sequence which turns a random collection of episodes into a story. But chronological sequence is a very primitive feature and it can have only one merit: that of making the audience want to know what happens next. The only skill of a storyteller is their ability to wield the weapon of suspense, making the audience eager to discover the next event in the sequence.

This emphasis on chronological sequence is a difference from real life. Our real lives also unfold through time but have the added feature that some experiences have greater value and meaning than others. Value has no role in a story, which is concerned with the life in time rather than the life by values. And because human lives measured by time consist of nothing more than the business of getting old, a story cannot sincerely lead to any conclusion but the grave.

-E. M. Forster-

**EXERCISE**

**Make a list of**

**5 different *conflicts*,**

**5 *“clocks,”* and**

**5 *settings or places*.**

**Pick one from each category at random; and see where your imagination takes you.**

**Reading plays is also a great way for a writer to find inspiration. You can find some at your local library. If you read a play and love it, think about why. What makes it so good? How does it work?**

**Story Development**

Writing off the top of our head sometimes is great to capture a fleeting idea. But real planning and preparation work can save the writer a lot of frustration and backpedaling. Outlining and breaking down the dramatic elements of a story are well worth the effort. By playing contrasts and conflict to maximum effect the playwright can stir the primal in us.

There are so many ways to approach an idea. And the actual activity of logging in the possibilities is not a pleasant task. But having an easy and systematic method to catalog ideas, dialogue, and other snippets is like having an assistant available at all time to do your bidding.

**Top Ten Tips**

1. **Create a world that's true to real life or fantastical or that mixes the mundane with the magical. But whatever set of rules you create for that world, make sure you follow them.**
2. **Write a** [**conflict**](http://www.playwriting101.com/glossary#conflict) **that builds as the play progresses. As you structure the conflict, think in terms of your play having a beginning, a middle and an end.**
3. **Write** [**characters**](http://www.playwriting101.com/glossary#character) **that want something (which puts them in conflict with other characters) and try to get what they want at every moment.**
4. **Make sure that each character has something at stake, a consequence if he doesn't get what he wants.**
5. **Create a "**[**ticking clock**](http://www.playwriting101.com/glossary#ticking-clock)**" that puts the characters under pressure to get what they want right away.**
6. **Make sure there is a good reason, an "event," for your play. It's not enough for two characters to sit around and talk for a while and then leave. There needs to be some important reason why we're watching them now, at this particular moment.**
7. **Write** [**dialogue**](http://www.playwriting101.com/glossary#dialogue) **that illuminates your characters and advances the plot at the same time.**
8. **Make each character speak in a distinctive voice. If you have trouble with that, try imagining a specific actor you know - even if it's someone who will never play the part - in the role.**
9. **Do *not* have a character tell us something she can show us instead. For example, it's much more effective to hide under the bed than to say "I'm afraid."**

**Give each character a "moment," something that justifies the character's existence in your play and that makes him attractive for an actor to play.**

**HE:** Well!

**SHE:** Well!

**HE:** Well, here we are.

**SHE:** Here we are, aren’t we?

**HE:** Eeyop. I should say we are. Here we are.

**SHE:** Well!

**HE:** Well! Well! How does it feel to be a married lady?

**SHE:** Oh, it’s too soon to ask me that. We have only been married about three

hours, haven’t we?

**HE:** We have been married exactly two hours and twenty-six minutes.

**SHE:** … Goodness, I don’t see why people do it every day.

**HE:** Do what?

**SHE:** Get married.

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**HE**

Well!

**SHE**

Well!

**HE**

Well, here we are

**SHE**

Here we are, aren’t we?

**HE**

Eeyop. I should say we are. Here we are.

**SHE**

Well!

**HE**

Well! Well! How does it feel to be a married lady?

**SHE**

Oh, it’s too soon to ask me that. We have only been married about three

hours, haven’t we?

**HE**

We have been married exactly two hours and twenty-six minutes.

**SHE**

… Goodness, I don’t see why people do it every day.

**HE**

Do what?

**SHE**

Get married.

**On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco**

**By**

**Anton Chekhov**

**NYUKHIN**: (He enters the stage with great dignity, wearing long side whiskers and worn-out frock coat. He bows majestically to his audience, adjusts his waistcoat, and speaks.)

Ladies and ... so to speak... gentlemen. It was suggested to my wife that I give a public lecture here for charity. Well, if I must, I must. It's all the same to me. I am not a professor and I've never finished the university. And yet, nevertheless, over the past thirty years I have been ruining my health by constant, unceasing examination of matters of a strictly scientific nature. I am a man of intellectual curiosity, and, imagine, at times I write essays on scientific matters -- well, not exactly scientific, but, if you will pardon me, approximately scientific. Just the other day I finished a long article entitled: "On the Harmfulness of Certain Insects." My daughters liked it immensely, especially the part about bedbugs. But I just read it over and tore it up. What difference does it make whether such things are written? You still have to have naphtha. We have bedbugs, even in our grand piano... For the subject of my lecture today I have taken, so to speak, the harm done mankind by the use of tobacco. I myself smoke, but my wife told me to lecture on the harmfulness of tobacco, and so what's to be done? Tobacco it is. It's all the same to me; but, ladies and... so to speak gentleman... I urge you to take my lecture with all due seriousness, or something awful may happen. If any of you are afraid of a dry, scientific lecture, cannot stomach that sort of thing, you needn't listen. You may leave.

(He again adjusts his waistcoat.)

Are there any doctors present? If so, I insist that you listen very carefully, for my lecture will contain much useful information, since tobacco, besides being harmful, contains certain medical properties. For example, if you take a fly and put him in a snuff box, he will die, probably from nervous exhaustion. Tobacco, strictly speaking, is a plant... Yes, I know, when I lecture, I blink my right eye. Take no notice. It's simple nervousness. I am a very nervous man, generally speaking. I started blinking years ago, in 1889, to be precise, on September the thirteenth, the very day my wife gave birth to our, so to speak, fourth daughter, Varvara. All my daughters were born on the thirteenth. But...

(He looks at his watch.)

…time at our disposal is strictly limited. I see I have digressed from the subject.   
I must tell you, by the way, that my wife runs a boarding school. Well, not exactly a boarding school, but something in the nature of one. Just between us, my wife likes to complain about hard times, but she has put away a little nest egg... some forty or fifty thousand rubles. As for me, I haven't a kopek to my name, not a penny... and, well, what's the use of dwelling on that? At the school, it is my lot to look after the housekeeping. I buy supplies, keep an eye on the servants, keep the books, stitch together the exercise books, exterminate bedbugs, take my wife's little dog for walks, catch mice. Last night, it fell to me to give the cook flour and butter for today's breakfast. Well, to make a long story short, today, when the pancakes were ready, my wife came to the kitchen and said that three students would not be eating pancakes, as they had swollen glands. So, it seems we had a few too many pancakes. What to do with them? First my wife ordered them stored away, but then she thought awhile, and she said, "You eat those pancakes, you scarecrow." When she's out of humor, that's what she calls me: "scarecrow," or "viper," or "devil." What sort of devil am I? She's always out of humor. I didn't eat those pancakes; I wolfed them down. I am always hungry. Why yesterday, she gave me no dinner. She says, "What's the use feeding you, you scarecrow..." However,...

(He looks at his watch.)

…I have strayed from my subject. Let us continue. But some of you, I'm sure, would rather hear a romance, or a symphony, some aria...   
(He sings.)   
"We shall not shrink in the heart of battle:   
Forward, be strong."   
I forget what that comes from... Oh, by the way, I should tell you that at my wife's school, apart from looking after the housekeeping, my duties include teaching mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography, history, solfeggio, literature, and so forth. For dancing, singing, and drawing, my wife charges extra, although the singing and dancing master is yours truly. Our school is located at Dog Alley, number 13. I suppose that's why my life has been so unlucky, living in house number thirteen. All my daughters were born on the thirteenth, I think I told you, and our house has thirteen windows, and, in short, what's the use? Appointments with my wife may be made for any hour, and the school's prospectus may be had for thirty kopeks from the porter.   
(He takes a few copies out of his pocket.)   
Ah, here you see, I've brought a few with me. Thirty kopecks a copy. Would anyone care for one?   
(A pause.)   
No one? Well, make it twenty kopecks.

(Another pause.)

What a shame! Yes, house number thirteen. I am a failure. I've grown old and stupid. Here I am, lecturing, and to all appearances enjoying myself, but I tell you I have such an urge to scream at the top of my lungs, to run away to the ends of the earth... There is no one to talk to. I want to weep. What about your daughters, you say, eh? Well, what about them? I try to talk to them, and they only laugh. My wife has seven daughters. Seven. No. Sorry, it's only six. Now, wait, it is seven. Anna, the eldest, is twenty-seven, the youngest is seventeen. Ladies and gentleman:   
(He looks around surreptitiously.)   
I am miserable: I have become a fool, a nonentity. But then, all in all, you see before you the happiest of fathers. Why shouldn't I be, and who am I to say that I am not? Oh, if you only knew: I have lived with my wife for thirty-three years, and, I can say they are the best years of my life... well, not the best, but approximately the best. They have passed, as it were, in a thrice, and, well, to hell with them.   
(Again, he looks around surreptitiously.)   
I don't think my wife has arrived yet. She is not here. So, I can say what I like. I am afraid... I am terribly afraid when she looks at me. Well, I was talking about our daughters. They don't get married, probably because they're so shy, and also because men can never get near them. My wife doesn't give parties. She never invites anyone to dinner. She's a stingy, shrewish, ill-tempered old biddy, and that's why no one comes to see us, but... I can tell you confidentially...   
(He comes down to the edge of his platform.)   
on holidays, my daughters can be seen at the home of their aunt, Natalia, the one who has rheumatism and always wears a yellow dress covered with black spots that look like cockroaches. There you can eat. And if my wife happens not to be looking, then you'll see me...   
(He makes a drinking gesture.)   
Oh, you'll see I can get tipsy on just one glass. Then I feel so happy and at the same time so sad, it's unimaginable. I think of my youth, and then somehow I long to run away, to clear out. Oh, if you only knew how I long to do it! To run away, to be free of everything, to run without ever looking back... Where? Anywhere, so long as it is away from that vile, mean, cheap life that has made me into a fool, a miserable idiot; to run away from that stupid, petty, hot headed, spiteful, nasty old miser, my wife, who has given me thirty-three years of torment; to run away from the music, the kitchen, my wife's bookkeeping ledgers, all those mundane, trivial affairs... To run away and then stop somewhere far, far away on a hill, and stand there like a tree, a pole, a scarecrow, under the great sky and the still, bright moon, and to forget, simply forget... Oh, how I long to forget! How I long to tear off this frock coat, this coat that I wore thirty-three years ago at my wedding, and that I still wear for lectures for charity!   
(He tears off his coat.)   
Take that: And that:   
(Stamping on the coat.)   
I am a poor, shabby, tattered wretch, like the back of this waistcoat. (He turns his back showing his waistcoat.) I ask for nothing. I am better than that. I was young once; I went to the university, I had dreams, I thought of myself as a man, but now... now, I want nothing. Nothing but peace... peace.   
(He looks off stage. Quickly he picks up his frock coat and puts it on.)   
She is here. My wife is there in the wings waiting for me.

(He looks at his watch.)

I see our time is up. If she asks you, please, I beg you, tell her that her scarecrow husband, I mean, the lecturer, me, behaved with dignity. Oh, she is looking at me.   
(He resumes his dignity and raises his voice.)   
Given that tobacco contains a terrible poison, which I have had the pleasure of describing to you, smoking should at all costs be avoided, and permit me to add my hopes that these observations on the harmfulness of tobacco will have been of some profit to you. And so I conclude. *Dixi et animam levavi!*\*   
(He bows majestically, and exits with grand dignity.)

**The End**

* “I have spoken and relieved my soul.” (Latin)

**THE PHILADELPHIA**

By David Ives

**CHARACTERS**: Al: California Cool; 20s or 30s Mark: frazzled; 20s or 30s Waitress: weary; as you will

**SETTING**: A restaurant. A table, red-checkered cloth, two chairs and a specials board.

**AL** is at the restaurant table, with the **WAITRESS**

**WAITRESS:** Can I help you?

**AL:** Do you know you would look fantastic on a wide screen? WAITRESS: Uh-huh. AL: Seventy millimeters.

**WAITRESS:** Look. Do you want to see a menu, or what?

**AL:** Let’s negotiate, here. What’s the soup du jour today?

**WAITRESS:** Soup of the day you got a choice of Polish duck blood or cream of kidney.

**AL:** Beautiful. Beautiful! Kick me in a kidney.

**WAITRESS:** (Writes it down) You got it.

**AL:** Any oyster crackers on your seabed?

**WAITRESS:** Nope. All out.

**AL:** How about the specials today, spread out your options.

**WAITRESS:** You got your deep fried gizzards.

**AL:** Fabulous.

**WAITRESS:** Calves’ brains with okra.

**AL:** You are a temptress.

**WAITRESS:** And pickled pigs’ feet.

**AL:** Pigs. feet. I love it. Put me down for a quadruped.

**WAITRESS:** If you say so.

**AL:** Any sprouts to go on those feet?

**WAITRESS:** Iceberg.

**AL:** So be it.

(**WAITRESS** exits, as **MARK** enters, looking shaken and bedraggled.)

**MARK:** Al!

**AL:** Hey, there, Marcus. What’s up?

**MARK:** Jeez!

**AL:** What’s going on, buddy?

**MARK:** I don’t get it, Al. I don’t understand it.

**AL:** You want something? Want a drink? I’ll call the waitress…

**MARK:** No! No! Don’t even try. (Gets a breath.) I don’t know what’s going on today, Al. But it’s weird.

**AL:** What, like…?

**MARK:** Right from the time I got up.

**AL:** What is it? What’s the story?

**MARK:** Well—just for an example. This morning I stopped off at a drug store to buy some aspirin. This is at a big drug store, right?

**AL:** Yeah…

**MARK:** I go up to the counter, the guy says “What can I do for you?” I say, “Give me a bottle of aspirin.” The guy gives me this funny look and he says, “Oh, we don’t have that, sir.” I said to him, “You’re a drug store and you don’t have any aspirin?”

**AL:** Did they have Bufferin?

**MARK:** Yeah!

**AL:** Advil?

**MARK:** Yeah!

**AL:** Extra-strength Tylenol?

**MARK:** Yeah!

**AL:** But no aspirin.

**MARK:** No!

**AL:** Wow…

**MARK:** And that’s the kind of weird thing that’s been happening all day. It’s like, I go to a newsstand to buy the DAILY NEWS, the guy never even heard of it.

**AL:** Could have been a misunderstanding.

**MARK:** I asked every place—nobody had the news! I had to read the TORONTO HAIRDRESSER. Or this. I go into a Deli at lunchtime to buy a sandwich, the guy tells me they don’t have any Pastrami. How can they be a Deli if they don’t have Pastrami?

**AL:** Was this a Korean deli?

**MARK:** This was a Kosher from Jerusalem Deli. “Oh, we don’t carry that, sir.” He says to me. “Have some tongue.”

**AL:** Mmm.

**MARK:** I just got into a cab, the guy says he doesn’t go to 56th street! He offers to take me to Newark instead!

**AL:** Mm-hm.

**MARK:** Looking at me like I’m an alien or something!

**AL:** Mark. Settle down.

**MARK:** “Oh, I don’t go there, sir.”

**AL:** Settle down. Take a breath.

**MARK:** Do you know what this is?

**AL:** Sure. MARK: What is it? What’s happening to me?

**AL:** Don’t panic. You’re in a Philadelphia.

**MARK:** I’m in a what?

**AL:** You’re in a Philadelphia. That’s all.

**MARK:** But I’m in—

**AL:** Yes, physically you’re in New York. But, metaphysically, you’re in a Philadelphia.

**MARK:** I’ve never heard of this!

**AL:** You see, inside of what we know as reality there are these pockets, these black holes called Philadelphias. If you fall into one, you run up against exactly the kinda stuff that’s been happening to you all day.

**MARK:** Why?

**AL:** Because in a Philadelphia, no matter what you ask for, you can’t get it. You ask for something, they’re not going to have it. You want to do something, it ain’t gonna get done. You want to go somewhere, you can’t get there from here.

**MARK:** Good God. So this is very serious.

**AL:** Just remember, Marcus, this is a condition named for the town that invented the Cheese Steak. Something that nobody in his right mind would willingly ask for.

MARK: And I thought I was just having a very bad day…

**AL:** Sure. Millions of people have spent entire lifetimes inside a Philadelphia and never even knew it. Look at the city of the Philadelphia itself. Hopelessly trapped forever inside a Philadelphia. And do they know it?

**MARK:** Well, what can I do? Should I just kill myself now and get it over with?

**AL:** You try to kill yourself in a Philadelphia, you’re only gonna get hurt, babe.

**MARK:** So, what do I do?

**AL:** Best thing you can do is wait it out. Someday the great cosmic train will risk you outa the City of Brotherly Love and off to someplace happier.

**MARK:** You’re pretty mellow today.

**AL:** Yeah, well. Everybody has to be someplace.