

vsa Playwright Discovery Resource Guide



*“[Disability] is an experience
that shapes my life and view of the world,
and a topic that I find endlessly fascinating
because there is that universal element...
It is the one minority class in which anyone
can become a member of at any time.”*

— John Belluso, playwright
The San Francisco Observer

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PROLOGUE

The Changeling by Paul Baumbusch

Photo: Scott Suchman

Actor: Leah Pike

ASL Interpreter: Susan Karchmer

Prologue

Welcome to the [VSA Playwright Discovery Resource Guide](#). This publication helps students prepare submissions for VSA's annual Playwright Discovery Award Program, by introducing students to new ways to consider disability, playwriting, dramaturgy or editing their play, presentation, and production. A number of leading theater practitioners have contributed to this guide, ensuring a comprehensive and current exploration of disability and theater.

Many of the exercises were designed to be completed within a single class period with minimal follow-up homework. However, the exercises may be extended if necessary. In general, most creative portions—writing a scene or creating character—should be allotted 10–15 minutes; reviewing and creative conversation should be allotted 2–5 minutes per scene; rewriting should be allotted 20–25 minutes. That said, how long it takes to complete the exercise or activity is not important. What is important is that the theatrical, writing, dramaturgical, or disability concept be explored, and the creative thinking process expanded. Much of the guide may be used in any order; however, many of the exercises do build on one another. It is written in a style that allows you to share each introduction or exercise directly with your students.

This guide includes a **Prologue**, five **Acts**, and an **Epilogue**.

The **Prologue** is directed to the teacher.

Act I explores disability within society, and how people with disability are referred to in language, and often represented on stage or in the media.

Act II offers exercises that introduce students to the techniques playwrights use to create believable characters, exciting scenarios, and engaging scenes. The exercises build to lead students to incorporate disability issues and concerns into the characters or scene.

Act III leads students through the rewriting and editing process so that they can enhance their work (and that of their classmates) and improve their collaboration skills. The rewrite process—or shaping what you have so that it's more like what you imagined—is often facilitated by a dramaturg. The dramaturgical process gives students the tools needed to shape any project, be it for English, Science, or History class.

Act IV provides examples of proper play presentation.

Act V has an assessment for students to complete both before and after using the exercises in the guide. The assessment determines their awareness of disability within the culture and specific aspects of language arts and theater terminology.

The **Epilogue** explains how the plays are evaluated for VSA's Playwright Discovery Award.

A goal of this guide and project is to encourage the discussion and awareness of disability and increase/improve the writing and literacy skills of middle and high school students through the art of playwriting. The guide also hopes to introduce young people to the many artists with disabilities creating and performing today, and includes bios of professional writers/performers throughout.

Plays chosen as Playwright Discovery Program Award winners will receive a production at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. All photographs of productions featured throughout this guide are of plays written by past Playwright Discovery Award recipients.

To help students create rich and complex characters with disability, consider sharing Victoria Ann Lewis's strategies listed below.

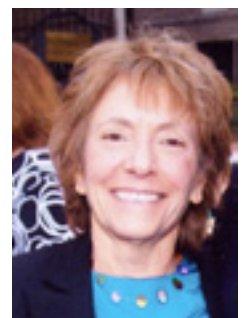
Suggestions for Representing Disability

- Create characters that directly confront disability prejudice and discrimination.
- Write characters whose personalities are informed by multiple aspects of their identity such as race, class, gender, and disability.

- Have more than one character with a disability in a play to avoid isolating characters with disabilities so they do not have to represent all people with disabilities.
- Make use of humor, a strategy that many people with disabilities use in real life to deal with barriers.
- Explore what makes disability cool, or the joys and celebrations of living as a person with a disability.
- Include the real details from the lives of people with disabilities, such as relationships with personal assistants and the use of accommodations.
- Write about disability history, or creating documentary drama about disability in different times and places. ■

The Dramaturgy of Disability
— Victoria Ann Lewis

GET TO KNOW A PLAYWRIGHT: **Victoria Ann Lewis** is a playwright, actor, and university theater professor who founded the *Other Voices Project*, a development laboratory for new work by playwrights with disabilities at the Mark Taper Forum | Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles. Other Voices brought together artists and scholars with disabilities to collaborate and create new work as well as train and mentor many theater artists with disabilities. She created and directed several documentaries for the stage and television with the disability community, teen mothers, and blue collar workers, the most well known of which is *Tell Them I'm a Mermaid* (1983).



National Standards for the Arts

The exercises in the Playwright Discovery Resource Guide meet a number of the National Standards for the Arts, and most specifically those listed below.

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| NA-T.5-8.5 | Researching using cultural and historical information to support improvised and scripted scenes. |
| NA-T.9-12.5 | Researching by finding information to support classroom dramatizations. |
| NA-T.5-8.6 | Comparing and incorporating art forms by analyzing methods of presentation and audience response for theater, dramatic media (such as film, television, and electronic media), and other art forms. |
| NA-T.9-8.7 | Analyzing, evaluating, and constructing meanings from improvised and scripted scenes and from theater, film, television, and electronic media productions. |
| NA-T.9-12.1 | Script writing by planning and improvising, writing and refining scripts based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history. |
| NA-T.9-12.7 | Analyzing, critiquing, and constructing meanings from informal and formal theater, film, television, and electronic media productions. |

From www.educationworld.com/standards/national & www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/standards



3/4 of a Mass for St. Vivian by Phoebe Rusch
Photo: Stan Barouh
Actors: Kathleen Coons and Erica Chamblee

He thinks about
having wings!



GET TO KNOW A PLAYWRIGHT: Susan Nussbaum is a playwright, actor, and disability activist living in Chicago. Among her seven published plays are *No One as Nasty* (2000); *Parade*, which won the Illinois Arts Council 2000 Literary Award; *Mishuganismo* (1991); and *The Plucky and Spunky Show* (written with Mike Ervin in 1990). She has appeared onstage with The Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, and Second City e.t.c. among others. She is also a Coordinator for the Arts and Culture Project of Access Living, Chicago's Independent Living Center. This program includes a collection of artwork, a performance series, and ongoing events featuring artists with disabilities.



ACT I

PREPARATION: Exploring Disability, Disability Culture, and the Legacy of Difference

Izzy Icarus Fell Off the World by Aliza Goldstein

Photo: Scott Suchman

Actors: Jessica Francis Dukes and Tara Giordano

ASL Interpreter: Lisa Agogliati

ACT I: PREPARATION

Disability and Society

We are living in an exciting time of change for people with disabilities. On July 26, 1990, the United States Congress passed the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, also known as the ADA. This civil rights legislation has improved the lives of millions of people with disabilities and their families by increasing access to education, employment, public places, communications, and voting.

The passage of the ADA represents a significant change in how society understands disability. For example, children with disabilities who attended school before the ADA had a very different experience than those today. Pre-ADA, students with physical disabilities may not have been able to enter their school because access was limited—ramps were not built or elevators installed in the building. Students who were deaf, had autism, or had learning disabilities were also unable to attend most public schools, because alternative communication and teaching methods were not used in the classroom. Thanks to the ADA and other important legislation like the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (amended and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990), discrimination based on a need for accommodations is no longer legal. Today, disability is seen as part of human diversity, not just an individual’s medical problem.

One way historians and scholars uncover the attitudes a culture has is by analyzing how storytellers—playwrights, poets, novelists, songwriters, and filmmakers—represent the people and the issues of their times.

Metaphors

The ancient Greek dramatists Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides include characters with disabilities in their plays as do the early writers from other cultures and eras. These characters’ disabilities determined how the character functioned but do not necessarily reflect how people with disability truly lived, thought, or behaved. In other words, most playwrights have used disability as a metaphor so that the character has a special meaning within the play. Usually these metaphors reflect and reinforce society’s negative or limiting attitudes about people with disabilities.

If metaphors are so important, what are they and how do they work? How might a writer harness the power of metaphors to create new meanings or avoid them altogether?

A metaphor uses one object or being to represent another. For example, someone might exclaim, “This classroom is a furnace!” This metaphor compares the classroom to a furnace. Metaphors also tend to highlight the similarities between the compared objects and downplay their differences. In the example, the furnace’s heat is compared to the classroom, not its mechanical properties. However, drawing attention to similarities can create greater meaning by suggesting that the classroom is a claustrophobic, small space that

heats up quickly. Isn't it much more interesting to say "this classroom is a furnace" rather than "this classroom is hot"?

Disability as Metaphor

Disability metaphors are common in the English language. These figures of speech rely on negative associations or stereotypes to communicate meaning. *For example:*

- His explanation of the crime was just a *lame* excuse for greediness.
- He was *blind* to the possibilities of earning a college degree.
- The ruler turned a *deaf* ear to the plight of the peasants.
- Our nation is *crippled* by economic recession.
- That homework assignment was *retarded*.
- You are such a *spaz*!

These negative metaphors and clichéd expressions assume that mobility disabilities such as lameness and being crippled; sensory disabilities such as deafness and blindness; and intellectual disabilities such as retardation are inherently negative. In fact, some words like "cripple," "spaz," and "retard" are so inflected with hurtful histories and hateful uses that they have become taboo. Yet there is nothing inherently bad with any of these disabilities. Each of these disabilities is a mixture of good and bad, like any aspect of the human condition. Writers think carefully before using such expressions, because the character's language choice tells the audience if they are polite, considerate, mean, or insensitive.

Think about your own use of language. Do you find any of these metaphors creeping into your vocabulary in everyday life or in your writing? If you do use these and other figures of speech, can you use them to help others reflect on the impact these phrases have?

Disability metaphors are also applied to characters' entire personalities and used to suggest personality failings or negative attributes. The following are the most common ways people with disability are portrayed.

Villainous Monsters often have a physical disability, such as a missing limb, or a disfigurement, such as a facial scar, that becomes a metaphor for a character's wicked inner life. Sometimes the characters are seeking revenge against those responsible for their disabilities. Other times, the physical difference is used as a visual metaphor to convey ugliness, fear, and even terror. Such representations reinforce the belief that people with disabilities are angry about having a disability and that this makes them dangerous. In real life, fear of people with disabilities based on appearance is a major barrier to social acceptance. Examples of Villainous Monsters include:

- Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*
- Richard III in *Richard III*
- Darth Vader in *Star Wars*
- Two-Face in *Batman*
- Colonel Miles Quaritch in *Avatar*

Innocent Victims often have physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities that serve as metaphors for a character's psychological weakness or physical vulnerability. These characters with disabilities are seen as weak and vulnerable or as victims who need protection or to be cured by characters without disabilities. These characters are often portrayed as medical patients. These characters function as moral barometers for non-disabled characters, which means that non-disabled characters' moral goodness is established and measured by how they treat

the innocent victim with a disability. These representations reinforce the beliefs that people with disabilities cannot direct their own lives and that they exist solely to bring out the goodness and charity of people without disabilities. In real life, pity for people with disabilities is a major barrier to being considered competent managers of their own lives.

Examples of Innocent Victims include:

- Tiny Tim from *A Christmas Carol*
- Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*
- John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*
- Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*
- Maggie Fitzgerald in *Million Dollar Baby*

Fantasy Creatures represent the storyteller's natural human curiosity about bodily difference to set these characters apart from humanity. The differences these characters present cast them as alien, fantastical, or freakish. These representations suggest that people with disabilities are so different that they constitute a different species. In real life, people with disabilities are often segregated from mainstream society because they are not considered fully human with the same needs, desires, and feelings that people without disabilities have. Examples of Fantasy Creatures include:

- The Oompa Loompas in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
- The Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz*
- The Seven Dwarves in *Snow White*
- Yoda in *Star Wars*

Heroic Inspirations are often superheroes who develop mystical powers to compensate for their disabilities. These characters' primary concern in life is to overcome their disabilities to do amazing things. Often, the characters overcome their disabilities by developing a good attitude (or superpowers). In real life, people with disabilities consider their disabilities an aspect of who they are and do not spend every hour of every day trying to overcome their medical diagnosis. In real life, people with disabilities face discrimination, exclusion, and lack of access and accommodation from others, not self-generated negative attitudes toward their disabilities. Examples of Heroic Inspirations include:

- Forrest Gump in *Forrest Gump*
- Jake Sully in *Avatar*
- Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*
- Nemo in *Finding Nemo*
- Matt Murdock in *Daredevil*
- The Mutants in *X-Men*, especially Prof. Xavier

Characters who complicate or defy stereotypes examples include:

- Percy Jackson in *The Lightning Thief*
- Dr. Albert Robbins in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*
- Josephine "Joey" Lucas in *The West Wing*

Discussion Questions

1. What characters with disabilities have you seen in movies, television, and plays? Can you think of examples of the following characters with disabilities?
 - a. Villainous Monsters
 - b. Innocent Victims
 - c. Freakish Fantasy Creatures
 - d. Heroic Inspirations
 - e. Characters that complicate or defy stereotypes
2. Can you think of characters from movies, television, and plays that do not fall into any of these categories? Or characters that only partially fit these categories? Or characters that have elements from more than one category? Explain your choices.
3. What attitudes about disability have you encountered in your life? How have these attitudes made you or others feel?
4. Think of alternate ways of expressing the same meanings in these phrases without using disability metaphors.
 - a. His explanation of the crime was just a *lame* excuse for greediness.
 - b. He was *blind* to the possibilities of earning a college degree.
 - c. The ruler turned a *deaf* ear to the plight of the peasants.
 - d. Our nation is *crippled* by economic recession.
 - e. That homework assignment was *retarded*.
 - f. You are such a *spaz*!

Considering Non-Apparent Disabilities Such as Autism

Non-apparent disabilities pose a playwriting challenge. How do you convey how a person thinks if speech and movement are difficult? Non-apparent disabilities may interest some playwrights but be difficult to realize for the stage. A way to create a character or situation may be to consider how strategies for success might influence dramatic choices.

Autism has been stereotyped in many forms of entertainment. When most think of autism, thoughts of Raymond Babbitt from *Rain Man* come to mind. Many people see this character and believe that all people with autism must be like Rain Man—extremely intellectual, able to count items at lightning speed, and have extreme and erratic behavior. The 2010 HBO television movie *Temple Grandin* is based on the early life of the world-famous animal scientist. Dr. Temple Grandin is a high-functioning woman with autism. Through some intriguing film techniques, the movie helps viewers understand how Dr. Grandin processes information differently from other people. However, it does not depict her as behaving in extreme or erratic ways like Rain Man, because not everyone with autism behaves similarly. These characters represent two types of autism. There are many different levels of autism with incredibly different symptoms. In fact, autism is a highly complex disorder. Many individuals today with autism can succeed at school and in the workplace. People with autism are still just that—people—and like every person on the planet they each have their own personalities, likes, and dislikes. View them for who they are and not who you expect them to be.

Considering Language

When considering language, some terms are preferred and some are considered inappropriate or rude. The difficulty is, a word can be acceptable one day and out-of-date the next. Language used to describe disability also changes often and quickly. Since the 1980s, many within the disability community have embraced a language known as People First. This emphasizes the person first and the disability second. For example, instead of saying “an award-winning paraplegic chef,” People First language encourages us to write “an award-winning chef who has paraplegia.” Within a play, it may be possible to identify this shift in language by having one character use the out-of-date term and have another character correct this choice.

Speaking with Awareness: People First Language

The following is an excerpt from Access and Opportunities: A Guide to Disability Awareness, a publication written and distributed by VSA. The complete guide can be found online at: vsarts.org.

Language shapes the way those around us speak and act toward one another and conveys the respect we have for others. The use of appropriate language about people with disabilities can be an important tool in building a community that accepts all people.

Appropriate language is both sensitive and accurate. VSA promotes the use of People First language that puts the focus on the individual, rather than on a disability. People First language helps us remember that people are unique individuals and that their abilities or disabilities are only part of who they are.

Suggestions to Improve Access and Positive Interactions

- Avoid euphemisms such as “physically challenged,” “special needs,” “differently abled,” and “handi-capable.”
- Avoid discussing disability by using terms such as “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” or “crippled with.” These expressions are considered offensive and inaccurate to people with disabilities.
- When referring to people who use wheelchairs, avoid terms such as “wheelchair bound” or “confined to a wheelchair.”
- When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize abilities rather than limitations, focusing on a person’s accomplishments, creative talents, or skills. This guideline does not mean avoiding mention of a person’s disability, but doing so in a respectful manner and only when relevant to the situation.

Considering Physical Performance

When actors take on the persona or physical life of a character, they engage in a complex process of changing who they are to best represent someone totally different from them. Sometimes the characters speak or look differently, but the actor always searches for ways to become the character in a way that is respectful and true. Unlike people who perform to get a laugh or make fun of someone, actors seek to present the character as a full person. A strong actor knows that any movements or speech patterns that illustrate difference are not exaggerated or

presented for entertainment. Instead, the gestures and language are based in true experiences and are rarely presented as large or broad gestures—like a clown.

When considering how to perform a character with a disability, consider how the character resembles the actor and then begin to craft or shape their differences.

Building a character slowly and with subtle gestures will allow for a truer, more realistic, less comic, or hurtful portrayal and performance. ■



For the Love of Goldfish by Ali Pavuk
Photo: Scott Suchman
Actors: Tony Nam, Michael Vitaly Sazonov,
and Lauren Williams



GET TO KNOW A PLAYWRIGHT: **Willy Conley** is a playwright, photographer, actor, director, and Professor and Chair of Theater Arts at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. His plays include *The Hearing Test* (1991), which won the One-Act Play Award of the Sam Edwards Deaf Playwrights Competition, and *The Universal Drum* (2004), which is a play for young audiences. In 2009, his collection of plays, *Vignettes of the Deaf Character and Other Plays*, was published. As an actor, he has appeared in NBC's *Law & Order* and performed on stage with the National Theatre of the Deaf, Pilobolus Dance Theater, Amaryllis Theatre, and others.

Photo: Willy Conley



ACT II

PLAYWRITING:

Igniting the Imagination and Putting Ideas on the Page

3/4 of a Mass for St. Vivian by Phoebe Rusch

Photo: Stan Barouh

Actors: Kathleen Coons and Erica Chamblee

ACT II: PLAYWRITING

Igniting the Imagination

When creating a character, a playwright's goal is to put a three-dimensional, believable being on stage. But first, the character must exist on paper. To begin shaping a character, a writer considers a number of possibilities or "What If...?". A writer also looks to build interest by adding tension and mystery into the story. Novels often use narrators to link main events in a story and establish a sense of what will happen next, but a play rarely relies on a narrator to weave the story. Instead, a playwright uses dialogue and stage action to generate a forward push, or to give a sense of what happens next in the story. ■



The Marionette Effect by Laura Hogikyan
Photo: Scott Suchman
Actor: Jenna Sokolowski

FOR THE ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK: The Building Blocks of a Play

The Root of Character

For a dynamic play, the characters need to be different from the writer and from each other. A good starting point may be to observe friends or strangers in conversation and in action. How are they different from each other? Just as important, how are they the same? What sorts of obstacles might keep us from seeing those similarities? Their clothing? Their speech? Also consider how these characters might change as the situation changes. To begin imagining well-grounded, believable characters, a writer conducts research. That research—learning about the characters and their world—can come through reading, observing, or thinking about your own experiences.

The Other Building Blocks of a Play Are:

The Main Character The person the audience follows to understand the bulk of the story. This figure confronts most of the play's challenges and conflicts. A successfully crafted Main Character changes or transforms somehow after a moment of crisis. It is also possible for a play to be more ensemble-based and have more than one main character. However, the major characters should still change over the course of the play.

The Dramatic Problem This is the set-up or question that the Main Character (or characters) must confront and solve. It should not be easy for the Main Character to address the problem. Initially, it may appear easy, but something should happen along the way to complicate the

problem and create a challenge that will cause the Main Character to grow and change.

Need or Want This is what the Main Character (or characters) must have or wishes to attain. The Need can be tangible (a ride to school, an A on a test, money to download songs) or an intangible, emotional want (to be accepted by a group of kids, to be loved by a parent). Whatever it is, it must be important to the character.

The Stakes This tells the character and audience how important the Dramatic Problem and Need are and adds great tension to the play or scene. Another way to think of the stakes is to ask, "What bad thing will happen to my character if she or he doesn't get what she or he needs?"

The Ticking Clock Time can be used to create tension in a play by raising the stakes and intensifying the obstacles. Something must be completed by a set time, and often something bad will happen if that deadline is missed.

The What Ifs These are the questions that writers ask to discover and then weave the elements of Character, Dramatic Problem, Need, and the Stakes into a compelling scene or play.

A Beat This is the smallest unit of action in a play, defined by characters having a particular objective or intention; a beat shifts when the character's intention or attempts to achieve an objective changes.

A Scene This is a unit of a play and is made up of beats.

PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 1 : The Root of Character

There are a number of ways to explore character: either begin with observing people; reading about people in the news (celebrities, politicians, regular people); researching a topic, ethnic or cultural group, or followers of a specific belief system; or thinking about personal experience. Choose at least two methods to begin exploring character. Record the observations and thoughts in a journal or with a digital voice recorder.

PART 1 Observation

Sometimes observing others while sitting in the library or cafeteria, on the bleachers, or at the local coffee shop can ignite the imagination. Writers often watch people, listen to how they use language, and then imagine what they might do in various situations.

A. Observe (by watching and/or listening) how people interact with others. Who chews on pencils or straws? Who drums their fingers on the desk? Who perks up when others are around and withdraws when alone? Who withdraws when others are around and perks up when alone? Listen to their speech—do they talk the same way to everyone, or does their tone or vocabulary change?

B. Listen to the person talk. Watch their eyes—do they look engaged? Bored? Or are they looking someplace they shouldn't?

C. Record physical actions, words, or physical attributes that strike you.

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PART 2 Investigation

Sometimes people in the news—celebrities, politicians, or regular people—grab our attention. We wonder how they achieved their fame, would behave at our school assembly, or would confront the school bully.

A. Think about what makes this person newsworthy. Will their fame last? Are they kind and genuine? Are they superficial?

B. Record physical actions, words, or physical attributes that strike you.

PART 3 Research

A. Read articles or listen to radio newscasts or watch video clips/films to learn more about a particular group. Refer to at least three sources.

B. What is important to this group?

What discoveries or accomplishments set this group apart?

Record insights into how this culture or group engages with the world.

PART 4 Reflection

Sometimes writers discover that the best way to explore a new world or circumstance is to borrow from the world they already know. While reflecting, try to be as open and unbiased (which is sometimes hard if we are involved in an experience) as possible.

A. Take a moment and think about the people in your life who may have a disability. Does your grandmother use a cane? Does your grandfather use hearing aids? Does your cousin stutter? Does your aunt use a wheelchair? Do members of your parish or synagogue or temple use service animals?

B. If you have a disability, what challenges have you experienced because of it? What actions have you taken to overcome it? How have others reacted to it? ■

PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 2 : What If...? Building the Foundation of Your Play

The *What If...?* exercise begins with a single image or sound or physical indicator of a disruption to construct a series of questions that explore possible choices. A physical indicator of a disruption could be a cell phone that vibrates and flashes before it rings or a fire alarm that blinks as it sounds.

To begin, consider:

- A single image: a book lies on the ground in a puddle.
- A sound or physical indicator of a disruption: there's the sound of rain or thunder, or lightning flashes.

Now, begin asking + answering a series of “What If’s...?”

PART 1 To Identify Character

What if the owner of the book is a middle school student?

What if that student is a girl?

What if that student has her final exam tomorrow?

PART 2 To Identify the Dramatic Problem

What if the book is a textbook belonging to a seventh grade student?

What if she read only the first few pages and planned to read the rest that night?

What if it's already night and the storm has made it too dark to see a dark blue-covered book on the ground?

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What if the “book” is actually a section from a book written in Braille?

What if it was a specially ordered copy?

What if the computer program that reads chapters aloud is not working?

PART 3 To Identify Needs or Wants

What if no one else has a copy she can use, because the other student in the class with a similar disability hasn't done the reading yet either?

PART 4 To Identify the Stakes

What if she needs to get an A on the exam to pass the course?

What if half of her grade for the course depends on doing well on the test?

What if failing the course will require her to attend summer school?

What if her attending summer school means her family won't be able to take its long-planned vacation?

What if the vacation is already paid for, and there are no refunds?

What if the girl's parents don't know she isn't prepared for the exam?

What if the girl has hidden her academic problems from them completely?

What if her service animal is afraid of the thunder?

What if the girl sneaks out alone in the storm to find the textbook?

PART 5 To Identify the Ticking Clock

What if the exam is first thing in the morning?

What if it's raining so hard that the chapter will be destroyed soon?

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PART 6 To Summarize Your Discoveries

Notice that with every “What If...?” we build more dramatic tension, so that by the end of our exercise, we have created a compelling set of given circumstances for our play:

Main Character

A seventh grade girl who is blind.

The Dramatic Problem

She has lost an important section from her unique Braille textbook right before her final exam and has ventured out in the middle of a strong storm to find it.

Her Need

She must find a way to get the textbook section back in time to study, or find a way to survive without it—and, of course, she must come back safely out of the storm.

The Stakes

If she doesn’t get an A on the exam, she will fail the course. Not only that but she’ll have to go to summer school if she doesn’t want to repeat seventh grade, and that means her family’s long-planned trip will be cancelled. And of course, by going out in the middle of the heavy thunderstorm, she, like anyone, risks serious injury.

The Ticking Clock

It’s already night, and the exam is first thing the next morning. That means she has very little time to retrieve the book, or find some other solution. Of course, the other problem is that the fierce storm is destroying the book, so if she doesn’t find it soon, it will be unusable.

To create more characters, come up with an image and sound or physical indicator of a disruption and begin asking, “What If...?” Remember to think about how a disability enhances the character and complicates the situation but isn’t the sole issue. ■

Creating Narrative and Dramatic Action Through Image and Word

Once a writer discovers the characters and identifies how they navigate the challenges of the world, it's time to discover how the characters contend with specific scenarios. Sometimes stories prove so exciting they spin out of control and never build to a particular point. Organizing the story can help avoid this problem. One of the best ways to order the events is to use a story board, which combines visual story markers with written descriptions.



Mistakes, Inc. by Jonathan Mayer
Photo: Scott Suchman
Actor: Genevieve James

PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 3 : Postcards From a Play—The Producer’s Version

This exercise introduces how to use a storyboard to create a narrative. What follows are possible scenarios or stories for each image. All writers should feel free to create their own scenarios for each postcard. A series of visual scenes or postcards and sound cues has been provided by the Producer, who has hired the writer to come up with the narrative that accompanies the images and sounds. There are five visual images and five soundscapes or physical indicators of a disruption that must be used to inspire an active, dramatic story told in five short scenes or beats.

PART 1 Create a Scenario

Create a scenario for the five postcards and add a sound and physical indicator to each postcard. The postcards appear without scenarios on page 73.

Postcard 1

Possible Story: John, middle school age, is seen rummaging through a school locker in a deserted hallway. Peter, same age, who uses metal crutches for each arm and has a backpack over his shoulders, has one hand on John’s arm, as if to stop him.

Disruptive Soundscape | Physical Indicator 1: The sound of a locker door popping open.



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Postcard 2

Possible Story: John is in mid-stride, fleeing with a cell phone in his hand, the locker door still open. Peter, on the ground, is raising himself with one crutch while reaching for the other one.

Disruptive Soundscape | Physical Indicator 2:

A metal crutch clangs against a concrete hallway as it falls.



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Postcard 3

Possible Story: Suzie, their classmate, pulls on one end of Peter's backpack, while Peter holds onto the other. The backpack is upside down, an antique clock in pieces on the ground beneath it.

Disruptive Soundscape | Physical Indicator 3: A shattering sound as an antique clock falls out of the backpack and breaks into pieces of wood and metal in that same hallway.



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Postcard 4

Possible Story: Peter is sitting, trying to put the clock together with one hand, his crutches and a bottle of glue on the ground next to him. John reaches for a piece of the clock, but Peter uses his other hand to fend him off.

Disruptive Soundscape | Physical Indicator 4: The sound of a school bell, signaling the end of the day.



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Postcard 5

Possible Story: Peter, John, and Suzie all sit on the ground working together on the clock, the stolen cell phone now squarely in front of Suzie.

Disruptive Soundscape | Physical Indicator 5: A cell phone goes off.



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>>>

PART 2 Draft a Narrative

Next, draft a narrative—a possible outline or scenario for a play—from these soundscapes and postcards. *For example:*

As our play begins, middle school student John breaks into a classmate's locker. Peter tries to stop him, but John wins their struggle, sending Peter sprawling to the ground, his crutches toppling. John escapes with his loot—a cell phone—while Peter picks himself up.

Suzie catches Peter near the scene of the crime and wrongly assumes he's the culprit. In her effort to look inside Peter's backpack to search for the missing phone, she dumps out an antique clock that Peter had brought for a special class presentation. The clock falls to the ground, and there's a shattering sound as the glass cracks and several pieces of the clock break off.

Peter sits on the ground, desperately trying to put the clock back together. The bell rings, and the hallway is filled with students, but Peter pays them no heed, a little island of misery in the middle of the hallway, with people stepping around him and occasionally accidentally kicking a piece of clock.

John catches a piece that's sliding along the hallway, and walks over to Peter with it. When John tries to help, Peter pushes him off. But John's persistence eventually triumphs, and Peter allows him to help.

The hallway clears out. Suzie enters and joins them. A phone rings somewhere among their possessions. John pulls it out and places it in front of Suzie, ringing. But she doesn't answer, choosing instead to focus on helping Peter put his clock back together as the lights dim. ■

VARIATION Postcards From a Play: The Director's Cut

The Producer's Version of Postcards from a Play asks the writer to create a narrative using sounds and images that were provided by the studio. In this version, the writer has full creative control to choose the visual images, the soundscape, and the narrative that connects it all together. Remember, each image must include at least two characters, and at least one image must include a conflict related to an apparent or non-apparent disability. At least one soundscape or physical indicator of a disruption must include a conflict related to an apparent or non-apparent disability. Every character must have a secret and work hard to hide it.

FOR THE ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK: Imagining Action and Physical Engagement on Stage

Once a writer has a sense of what shapes a character and how the individual character might solve problems or celebrate accomplishments, the question of how a character physically engages with the world arises. Discovering ways to feel and think like people we may not know can be a challenge, but through art, and especially theater, it is possible to begin to understand what other people celebrate, struggle with, think, or enjoy.

The most exciting challenge when imagining difference comes when a writer chooses to move beyond thinking the difference is the problem to be overcome. Difference allows for additional possibilities and exciting solutions, a major reason why artists often include characters who are most unlike the average person.

Imagining difference is a bit like navigating a dream. Imagine playing a game of, let's say, baseball. It's the final inning, your team is trailing by a single run, the bases are loaded with two outs, and the count is full. You are at the plate, and the best pitcher in the league is on the mound. The pitcher winds up, and just as the pitcher lowers the glove and begins to hurl the ball toward home plate, you suddenly find yourself holding a volleyball. The bat is gone, everyone wears knee pads, and people seem to be expecting something to happen. Is it time to serve the ball? Was there a side out and the other team should get the ball? The game has changed, and there's a new set of rules and possibilities. Having a disability likewise offers a new set of rules and possibilities for the writer to explore.

PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 4 : Changing the Game — Understanding Disability in Your Play

This exercise helps develop the creative muscles needed to begin imagining how an active character engages with others and the physical environment. And remember, all characters are active even if they do not appear so at first.

PART 1 Create a Moment of Action

Take two characters created in the [PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 2](#) and place them in a location and a situation where one character needs something from the other.

For example:

Character 1:	Michael, a young boy
Character 2:	The Director of an orphanage
Location:	The Director's office
Need:	Michael needs his teddy bear returned.
Action:	Michael searches for the teddy bear when the Director leaves.

Scenario

Ten-year-old Michael, a new arrival at an orphanage, has had a precious stuffed animal taken from him by the Director of the orphanage. The teddy bear is the only thing Michael has left to remind him of his mother. Michael has been called to the Director's office. When the Director steps into the hallway to discipline another student, Michael springs into action, searching the Director's office. The moment offers considerable tension because the Director is just outside the door and could return at any moment—and Michael will get into great trouble if he is caught.

>>>

PART 2 Write the Scenario as a Stage Direction in Your Play

For example:

▶ *The moment the Director exits the office and pulls the door closed behind him, Michael leaps to his feet as quietly as possible and listens at the door. Satisfied, he first searches the desk drawers, then listens at the door again before opening the closet door.*

PART 3 Change the Game—Keep the same characters, but imagine one with an apparent disability

Character and Disability

“What If...?” Michael uses a wheelchair?

Possibilities & Exciting Solutions

How will he navigate the Director’s office? Will he attempt to leave the chair to maneuver about the room? Does he have forearm crutches? Can he use those to help him free the stuffed animal? How is the speed or strategy of his search affected?

PART 4 Rewrite the Original Stage Direction, Taking Disability into Account

For example:

▶ *The moment the Director exits and pulls the door closed behind him, Michael wheels himself to the edge of the Director’s desk, reaching around trying to open the drawers. As he reaches, he looks around the room and notices the bear placed on a high shelf. Michael grabs his forearm crutches from the back of his wheelchair so that he can use them to free his favorite stuffed animal.*

Already, we can see that the speed of the search and the care that Michael must exercise are greatly different when we take his mobility into account. By placing the bear just out of reach, we have a greater sense that the Director may be cruel, and enjoys taunting Michael. We also have a chance to explore throughout the play the creative ways Michael will use objects in the space to successfully liberate his teddy bear from captivity.

>>>

PART 5 Repeat the Process by Exploring Other Disabilities

Character and Disability

“What If...?” Michael is deaf?

Possibilities & Exciting Solutions

How will he know when the Director is about to return if he can't hear the conversation in the hallway? Michael might keep one eye focused on the door handle while searching the room. The second the handle begins to move he might spring into action and return to his seat.

For example:

▶ *Michael's gaze follows the Director as he exits and pulls the door closed behind him. Keeping his focus on the door—and its handle to be precise—Michael slowly rises from his seat and walks backwards to the other side of the Director's desk. He keeps his hand along the desk so he can remain focused on the door handle. As he feels for each drawer and opens it, he searches by touch, watching the door handle as if his life depended on it.*

Character and Disability

“What If...?” Michael has a form of autism?

Possibilities & Exciting Solutions

The Night Nurse on duty tonight checks in on each resident every 5 minutes. Michael uses his watch alarm to time his trip.

For example:

▶ *It's bedtime. The orphanage is dark. Michael rises from his bed. He goes to the hall and begins walking toward the Director's office. He sees the nurse checking on each room. Freezes. He has to rescue his teddy bear but the nurse is near his room. He remembers his timer. He returns to the room and gets his timer/watch. Waits. The nurse passes his room. He sets the timer and heads toward the Director's office. ■*

FOR THE ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK: Imagining Dialogue

In novels, narration plays a large part in creating the story and a sense of how the character feels about another character or situation. Plays, however, rely largely on dialogue—the words characters speak to one another—and on physical action to reveal insights into what characters think or feel. Also, unlike novels, plays rarely have language that describes how the character delivers the lines.

For example, in a novel we might read, “Michael was afraid of the Director and his voice trembled as he said, ‘Good morning, Director.’” In a play, we depend on the language to reveal this emotion all on its own. Although the occasional word or two may be written in parentheses to help direct actors how to say the line, characters rarely tell us about their feelings directly. Sometimes we learn more about a character’s fear or joy from another character’s response. *For example:*

MICHAEL

Good. Morning. Good morning. Director.

DIRECTOR

Good morning, to you, Michael. Please—there’s no need to be afraid. I know an orphanage can be a scary place, but everyone here cares about you and only wants the best for you. Would you like a glass of water? Marjorie! A glass of water for the boy! Now, Michael...

A Few Tips About Dialogue:

1. Characters use words or what they say to get what they need.
2. Good dialogue advances the action and story of the play, and at the same time develops character.
3. Always try to show, not tell. For example, Michael grabbing his stuffed animal is much more powerful than his saying, “I want my stuffed animal.”
4. Dialogue is a highly edited form of real speech. Be careful about filler words like “uh” or “umm” or “like.”
5. Try to find variety in your dialogue, so that characters’ lines are of different lengths, have different punctuations—think of dialogue as if it were music. In a piece of music, there will be different volumes and notes of different lengths, and times when there will be rests. How can you bring that approach to your play?
6. Rather than speaking in a way that is “on the nose” and direct, it’s often more interesting when characters speak indirectly.

Direct: “Michael, you’re too old to sleep with a teddy bear.”

Indirect: “Ten-year-olds are too big for stuffed friends in their beds.”

Both lines say the same thing, but the second line is more interesting, because we have to do a little bit of thinking to figure out that the Director is talking about Michael and that Michael is too old to have a teddy bear.

PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 5 : Putting Words and Actions Together

PART 1 What's Happening?

Take the first scene with the stage directions created in [PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 4](#). Now, imagine what might have happened in the story both BEFORE and AFTER each set of stage directions. In our example, the Director leaves the office, and Michael searches the office for his beloved teddy bear. BEFORE that moment in the story, the Director might have confiscated Michael's stuffed animal. AFTER that moment in the story or stage direction, the Director returns from his conversation in the hallway.

PART 2 Write the Dialogue That Occurs BEFORE and AFTER the Original Stage Direction

This time, instead of using the original stage direction, use one you created in [PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 4](#). Write a short exchange between Michael and the Director of the orphanage: one exchange BEFORE the stage direction, and another AFTER. Write up to six lines of dialogue for each section. Remember, a line of dialogue is defined by the number of times a character speaks, not the number of sentences or phrases delivered.

In our example, the following dialogue precedes the original stage direction:

MICHAEL

Why can't I have it back?

DIRECTOR

No, no—this is much better. Trust me, this will be better. You trust me, don't you, Michael?

MICHAEL

I guess.

>>>

DIRECTOR

Look at you—you look more like a young man already. Young men don't need stuffed toys, now do they? Shall we begin again, young man?

MICHAEL

Good. Morning. Good morning. Director.

DIRECTOR

Good morning, to you, Michael. Please—there's no need to be afraid. I know an orphanage can be a scary place, but everyone here cares about you and only wants the best for you. Would you like a glass of water? Marjorie! A glass of water for the boy! Marjorie...

▶ *The moment the Director pulls the door closed behind him, Michael leaps to his feet as quietly as possible and listens at the door. Satisfied, he first searches the desk drawers, then listens at the door again before opening the closet door.*

Now, think about what the dialogue might be when the Director re-enters the office. Take the characters created in [PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 2](#) and imagine at least two with a disability.

PART 3 Combine Action and Dialogue

Review the scene and add additional stage directions to help frame the new dialogue. Feel free to add a few additional lines or characters. *For example:*

▶ *The Director, already seated behind his imposing desk, gestures for Michael to sit in a chair in front of it.*

MICHAEL

Why can't I have it back?

DIRECTOR

No, no—this is much better. Trust me, this will be better. You trust me, don't you, Michael?

MICHAEL

I guess.

▶ *Michael sits.*

>>

DIRECTOR

Look at you—you look more like a young man already. Young men don't need stuffed toys, now do they? Shall we begin again, young man?

MICHAEL

Good. Morning. Good morning. Director.

DIRECTOR

Good morning, to you, Michael. Please—there's no need to be afraid. I know an orphanage can be a scary place, but everyone here cares about you and only wants the best for you. Would you like a glass of water? Marjorie! A glass of water for the boy! Marjorie...

► *When there's no response, the Director gets up and exits abruptly. The moment the Director pulls the door closed behind him, Michael leaps to his feet as quietly as possible and listens at the door. Satisfied, he first searches the desk drawers, then listens at the door again before opening the closet door.*

Now, add in the dialogue written to come AFTER the stage direction to create a strong scene that flows and combines action and dialogue well.

PART 4 Consider Disability

As in [PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 4](#), it's important to consider disability. This time, instead of using the original stage direction, choose one you created in [PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 4](#). Or, come up with a new stage direction that includes disability. Consider also that the dialogue itself might change because of disability. Consider how the situation might change if either Michael or the Director had a disability that affected his speech or thought process. For example, what if Michael communicated using sign language and the Director didn't? What possibilities and creative solutions affect how they communicate? What if Michael has autism? What if Michael has ADHD? Tourette's Syndrome?

Remember, whether developing action or dialogue, it's important to consider the effects and opportunities for creative solutions the presence of disability contributes to the play, scene, and character.

- Does the character need to assess the environment?
- How does the character behave at home? Away from home?
- How do the characters communicate with each other?
- What other questions might generate multi-faceted and genuine characters? ■



GET TO KNOW A PLAYWRIGHT: Mike Ervin is a playwright, disability rights activist, and freelance journalist. He is the Coordinator of the Access Project at Chicago's Victory Gardens Theater. The Project hosts a series of disability culture events called *Crip Slam* and increases theater accessibility for people with disabilities as audience members and writers. His plays include *The History of Bowling* (1999) and *The Plucky and Spunky Show* (1990) written with Susan Nussbaum. He has published over 1,000 articles, mostly on disability-related topics, for the *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, and other publications.

Photo: Jon Randolph

ACT III

DRAMATURGY: Shaping What You Have into What You Want



Izzy Icarus Fell Off the World by Aliza Goldstein

Photo: Scott Suchman

Actors: Tyler Smith and Tara Giordano

ACT III: DRAMATURGY

Shaping What You Have into What You Want

What Does a Dramaturg Do?

Because the word *dramaturgy* literally means the study of dramatic structures, it is the dramaturg's responsibility to help focus the play's form, how it unfolds, and how the story builds. There are a number of dramatic structures writers study in school: the five-act structure Shakespeare follows; the well-made play form made famous by Henrik Ibsen; the two-act realistic play Tennessee Williams and John Belluso often followed; and the one-act expressionistic style Charles L. Mee and Adrienne Kennedy use to the fullest. Ironically, these now-common forms were once revolutionary, which means they were not taught in school. During the rewrite and reflection process, the dramaturg helps a writer clarify how the structure of the play or story follows or works to help the writer discover a new dramatic form. Most important, a dramaturg helps clarify the play so that the story is easier to follow and the conflict leads effortlessly to the climactic moment.

We're All Dramaturgs

When working on a new play, everyone—actors, directors, dramaturgs, and audience—has an opportunity to bring the play to life for the first time. This cooperation means that everyone has an opportunity to help the writer know what works well, what's funny, what's sad, and what is a bit confusing. If we embrace a few ideas, we can all be excellent dramaturgs and help the play become stronger than the writer initially imagined. ■

FOR THE ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK: The Elements of Dramatic Form

A play has basic elements that inform the flow of dramatic action and the form the play takes.

Plot

The specific events that build a story. A play's plot can be summarized in a single, active sentence. An active sentence has one or two verbs and few words that qualify and explain the story. For example: A boy meets a girl and tries to date her.

Story

How the plot unfolds. It often explains the circumstances that influence the plot. This would include descriptions of how the date came to be and how the boy and girl meet.

An Inciting Incident

The trigger that sets the story and conflict in motion

A Series of Conflicts

The obstacles the characters encounter and deal with. They either succeed or fail. Remember, failures reveal more than successes.

A Secret or Problem

A hidden truth the characters hide from one another or seek to uncover. Think of this as the mysteries within the story.

Characters Who Learn and Change

If characters know everything from the first page, they aren't very interesting. If we see them learn new things, discover truths about themselves or others, and watch them use that information to alter how they act or behave, the play will be strong and keep our interest.

A Crisis or Conflict Moment

These are mini crises or obstacles. Sometimes the characters can solve the problems simply or avoid them until the major conflict or crisis moment.

Conflict, the struggle of characters overcoming obstacles, creates the friction needed to create dramatic interest and action.

Character v Character

An example of Character v Character conflict is: One character wants to leave a room and another character stands in the way or says something that stops the other character from leaving.

Character v Situation

An example of Character v Situation conflict is: One character wants to leave the room but there is no visible door.

The Climactic Moment

The point of no return. This is the moment where every character's secret, need, and problem come together. When this moment ends, no one is the same. The play often ends very soon after this dramatic event.

DRAMATURGY EXERCISE 1: Uncover and Enhance Conflict and Suspense

PART 1 Identify the Wants and Obstacles

For this exercise, take a scene or dramatic writing exercise from the **Igniting the Imagination** section. First, identify what each character wants in a particular scene or moment. There may be many moments to the scene. If so, consider the want that is present throughout most of the scene. Characters often want information (where is the treasure hidden), an object (where is the treasure map), or assistance (help me find the treasure). If a character does not have a want, work with the writer to discover what that want or need could be.

A. What the character named _____ wants is _____.

Second, identify the obstacle; that is, the person, thing, or situation that prevents the character from achieving what he or she wants in a particular scene or moment. There may be many moments to the scene. If so, consider the want that is present throughout most of the scene. If a character does not confront an obstacle, work with the writer to discover what that obstacle could be and then explore ways to introduce this element to the scene.

B. The obstacle the character _____ confronts | battles | tackles is _____.

Repeat the questions for each character.

>>>

PART 2 The Magic Is in the Details

A. After identifying the wants and obstacles for each character—and every character must have a want and an obstacle—discuss whether the tension and conflict arise and resolve quickly or slowly.

To explore ways to increase the tension and conflict, a dramaturg's questions focus on how and why the conflict exists. A few questions to start a dramaturgical conversation with the writer could be:

- What makes this situation frightening for the character or characters?
- Is disability a shortcut to create a problem or challenge for only one character?
- What do the characters do to find solutions and why do some solutions fail?
- Does disability inspire creative and unique solutions that enrich the story?
- Is it always this difficult for this character or group of characters to solve a problem?

The goal is to discover ways to discuss the play and ways to enhance the story's conflict and tension by including more details about a character's past, present fears, or future hopes.

B. Take note of the specific points that excite the writer and suggest ways to include these discoveries to deepen the story or play. Use Open Questions, discussed on page 44, to help. ■

FOR THE ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK: The Dramaturg's Best Tool: The Open Question

An Open Question raises an idea or observation in a way that avoids telling the writer how to solve the problem. An Open Question also avoids telling the creator how you, the dramaturg or director or actor, would like to solve the problem. An Open Question leads to a discussion where the writer explores options and discovers answers.

A Closed Question

Does Michael need to look for a stuffed animal?

This question more than implies to the writer that the stuffed animal is not the ideal choice and that Michael should do something other than look for it. A Closed Question like this doesn't help the writer to develop the character or story outline.

An Open Question

What does the stuffed animal mean to Michael?

This question asks the writer to tell us about the relationship between Michael and his toy. This question makes way for a conversation and for the writer to discover things about the story or character.

Some Important Open Questions:

- **Why is this day (or night) different from any other day (or night)?**

As the writer describes what sets this day (or night) apart, the dramaturg listens for details that help identify the inciting incident and other truths about the play's world that are missing or aren't as prominent as they could be.

- **What is this character afraid of? How does this fear affect the journey?**

As the writer speaks, listen for details and descriptions that can become dramatic secrets or feed minor crisis moments or the major conflict.

- **What do we need to know to get from point A to point B?**

This question helps the writer explore how time passes in the play and how an audience learns information. All too often characters know things, but the audience doesn't. Keeping the audience in the dark can help with the story's mystery or it can just frustrate everyone. A dramaturg helps a writer strike a balance between knowing too much and not knowing enough.

FOR THE ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK: The Dramaturg's Second-Best Tool: Listening Well

The second part of asking an Open Question is listening well, which means listening to what's said, not for the answer one wants to hear.

- Listen for words the artist uses but the characters do not.

Sometimes the writer describes characters out loud one way and sets them on paper another way.

A writer may describe a self-important character by adopting a different vocal pattern and repeating the word “fabulous” every fourth word. A dramaturg can help a writer notice that the dialogue isn't written in dialect and the word “fabulous” never appears in the script.

For example, in the original draft:

SUZIE'S MOTHER

Oh, Suzie.

- Listen for places where the writer can be more specific.

For example, the revised version:

SUZIE'S MOTHER

Suzie, dahhling. Thahht's fabulous!

As the writer describes what she or he would like to see happen in the play or scene, think about where the writer can add these details.

- Listen for what drives the artist to pursue this project, the passion.
- Listen for what excites the writer about the story. Passion, if nothing else, keeps the journey going when times get rough and the rewriting process seems long.

DRAMATURGY EXERCISE 2 : Using Open Questions and Listening Well to Rewrite and Improve a Scene

To develop a scene, the writer and dramaturg do more than read and discuss it, they often engage the actors and audience by reading the scene aloud and then posing questions. The right questions can help the rewrites address specific areas and improve the scene quickly.

PART 1

Write a six-line scene.

Use six lines of dialogue to tell a brief story. The scene may be set in the future, present, or past, but must include information that helps the audience know the following: where are we; when is the play set (future, past, present); and what makes this world unique or special? Once the scene is written, the scene will be discussed, developed, and performed in small groups. Also, the scene should deal with disability in some way.

PART 2

Create small groups of 7–8.

Within these groups, student writers will select their cast and dramaturg. The writer does NOT have to create a play/scene with enough roles for the group. Every student will dramaturg a scene. Every student should perform in at least one scene.

PART 3

Cast the scene or play.

Writers should cast their play by choosing classmates from their group to read the work. Everyone should be cast in at least one play.

>>>

PART 4

Read the scene or play aloud.

PART 5

Develop the scene.

Once a play is read, the dramaturg should pose a few Open Questions to help guide the discussion. The group should participate in pointing to moments that they like or that are unclear, but remember to avoid suggesting how the writer should rewrite the scene. The discussion for each six-line scene should be 3–5 minutes.

Some Open Questions Might Be:

- What did you enjoy about the scene?
- What did you want to know more about (learn more about)?
- Was there a moment when you were confused? Anything else you loved about this scene?
- Did the scene have tension and believable obstacles or challenges for the characters?

PART 6

Repeat steps 4 and 5 until everyone's play has been read and discussed.

PART 7

Reflect.

Writers take 5–10 minutes to think about how to address the questions or comments the audience raised. Should they be addressed? Do the questions lead to other, more interesting questions?

PART 8

Rewrite the scene.

Take 15–25 minutes to rewrite the 6 lines. Up to 4 additional lines may be added to clarify/rewrite the scene. The final scene may be no longer than 10 lines. This step may be assigned as homework.

PART 9

Present the rewritten scenes to the group/class.

PART 10

The dramaturg for each scene and other group members should note the positive changes.

PART 11

Celebrate everyone's creative process with a round of applause. ■

FOR THE ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK: Time on Stage

When writing for the stage, it's important to indulge the imagination. However, a stage production presents challenges that film and television do not. In film and television, it's possible to present a Thanksgiving table with turkey and all the trimmings, and two seconds later reveal a Fourth of July picnic and a porch decorated with red, white, and blue streamers. Although it is possible to do this onstage, it requires great thought, an efficient stage crew, and a bit more than two seconds to execute the set change. If such a quick change is necessary for your play, you have to have it; however, the dramaturg and director can work with the writer to explore whether such a change is dramatically necessary and how to adjust the action so that the set change isn't distracting.

Using the character's dialogue—rather than stage directions—to tell us how time passes helps create a seamless flow of action within the play. This choice also allows the set designer and director to use more imagination when designing the show's look. Rather than rely on numerous realistic touches as a set decorator for film or television must, a stage designer can use a single, sometimes abstract, element to convey Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, or ten years in the future.

DRAMATURGY EXERCISE 3 : The March of Time

Review the scene created in [DRAMATURGY EXERCISE 2](#), and look for ways to identify how time helps shape the scene's action. Should stage directions or lines of dialogue be added to help the audience know when events take place? Can the action be enhanced by adding references to time: time of day, day of week, month, or year?

- How do we know when the scene is taking place?
- Is time revealed in a surprising manner?
- How can we connect the scenes so that they tell a single story over a period of time?
- What happens between each scene?
- Can we use time to increase the humorous or tragic moments?
- How can time appear to stand still or race on stage?
 - Can the writer extend a brief moment?
 - Can a long moment appear to simply fly by?
 - Can a moment appear too brief for one character and too long for another in the same scene?
 - Between scenes? ■

FOR THE ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK: Understanding the Rules of the Play's World

The *rules of the world* is a phrase that explores how the story, characters, and environment of the play function. The characters inhabit the world and are affected by things like time, space, or environmental cause and effect. The world's consistencies and variations add another layer to the storytelling or production. A dramaturg works with a writer to first explore how the world works and when the play's action, environment, or characters ignore the established rules. The second exploration is to decide whether to highlight the variations or rewrite the moment so that it follows the established rules.

Tips on Understanding the Rules of the World:

Every world has patterns and rules the characters must follow or consciously rebel against.

The Play's Environment

The play's environment may also be defined as truths that are followed and enhanced.

For example:

For a play that slowly reveals a character is a ghost, a stage direction might read, *Lights flicker whenever Suzie enters.*

Rules for Time

The actor and director must now explore an active way to illustrate how a character resigns herself or himself to wait.

For example, a stage direction might read:

A character who must wait for public transportation is shown waiting. The character avoids filling the time by reading a book or texting. The character simply waits.

The play's form or storytelling pattern—how we move from scene to scene or what events or actions cause certain action or repeated actions/events to occur—also has rules.

For example:

Whenever a character remembers something and begins to tell another character about it, the scene shifts to show the event.

Climactic Shifts

During or right before the *Climactic Moment*, or the point of no return, the rules of the world may also be in flux.

For example:

After Dorothy meets the Wizard of Oz, she discovers a new way to return home. ■

DRAMATURGY EXERCISE 4 : What Are the Rules at Your House?

The rules of the world are often discussed or explored in terms of “If...Then...” phrases, not unlike geometric proofs or algebraic equations, because the rules signify the logic within the play. This exercise will help develop a critical eye and ways to discuss and celebrate variations in storytelling while encouraging clarity in unique and creative choices.

PART 1 Explore the Play or Set of Scenes

Take the scene created in DRAMATURGY EXERCISE 2 or the scene created as part of the DRAMATURGY EXERCISE 3, and explore the current rules governing the world.

- A. Define the Plot
- B. Define the Story
- C. Identify the Dramatic Problem
- D. Find the Character Journey

For example:

The Scenario

Matt sits next to Alexa in Band. He’s impressed by her playing. They talk about music. They begin texting each other outside Band. Alexa brings Matt a cupcake for his birthday. Matt asks Alexa on a date—dinner and a movie. At the restaurant, Matt learns Alexa is allergic to nuts. Because the waiters can’t tell Alexa what is made with nuts or guarantee that no one who has touched nuts will serve her, Alexa politely tells Matt she cannot eat at the restaurant. Matt becomes flustered and instead of asking her where she can eat, he tells Alexa she requires too much special attention. Alexa leaves Matt at the restaurant and makes her way home on her own. Matt realizes he behaved like a jerk. He apologizes to Alexa at the next Band practice. Alexa accepts his apology and agrees to have Matt treat her to dinner at her favorite restaurant.

>>>

A. Define the Plot

Matt meets and tries to date Alexa.

B. Define the Story

Matt tries to get to know Alexa. They are in Band together and both like each other. When he takes her out for the first time, he discovers she's unable to eat at the restaurant he's chosen. He reacts badly when she tells him she can't eat at the restaurant. Later he apologizes. Alexa accepts his apology and teaches him about living with an allergy to nuts.

C. Identify the Dramatic Problem

How to react when a friend can't eat nuts.

D. Find the Character Journey

Alexa's Journey: To date Matt and teach him about nut allergies.

Matt's Journey: To date Alexa and learn about nut allergies.

PART 2 Identify the Areas to Explore Further

Consider ways to expand the current rules to enliven the play's story, dramatic problem, and character journeys. Explore how obstacles, environment, time, story, and plot function.

Consider the following:

- Identify character wants/needs and obstacles
- Identify how or why certain events take place
- Identify the dramatic problem or question
- Identify how the theme shapes or unites the character's journey
- Identify how character traits, talents, and disabilities impact the play's story
- Identify what creates the problem for the play—a disability, a philosophical or ethical question
- Identify how time functions
- Identify how environment or space functions
- Identify how scenes connect to one another

>>>

In this story, Alexa's allergy to nuts is the dramatic problem. The solution is rather easy: teach Matt about nut allergies. To create a more varied and less obvious story, the dramaturg and writer might explore ways to enrich the characters by expanding the obstacles or the character's ability to contend with challenges.

A. If...Then...Character Wants / Needs and Journey for MATT

Matt's sole need is to date the girl and his only obstacle is to improve his understanding of and ability to deal with someone who has a life-threatening allergy to nuts. The dramaturg and writer might look for a way to make him a bit less perfect, more human, or interesting.

- If Matt has to work extra hours to afford dinner and a movie **then** when she can't eat he....
- If Matt had difficulty playing a piece and she's a better player **then**...
- If Matt has a friend who tells him he's behaving like a jerk **then**...

B. If...Then...Character Wants / Needs and Journey for ALEXA

Alexa's journey is to allow Matt to apologize and improve Matt's understanding of a life-threatening nut allergy. She has few real wants and needs or obstacles that explore her as human character. Right now she's not a character but a device to help Matt and the audience learn about a life-threatening nut allergy. The writer and dramaturg might look for a way to give her something to pursue or discover about herself or others to make her more three-dimensional and less of a storytelling device.

- If Alexa loves Band and dislikes those who play less well than she does **then**...
- If Alexa is the section leader and needs to befriend all members **then**...

C. If...Then...Time and Place

How might changing the physical space or the story's time frame provide more insight into the characters, how they behave, and what they want?

- If Matt and Alexa meet outside the Band room **then**...
- If Matt and Alexa need to learn their parts in one week **then**...
- If Matt and Alexa need to prepare for a competition in four weeks **then**. . . ■



GET TO KNOW A PLAYWRIGHT: **Lynn Manning** is a playwright, actor, and poet, living in Los Angeles, California. Manning has performed his award-winning one-man show, *Weights*, around the world. He adapted his short play *Shoot* for film, which he also starred in. In 2001, *Shoot* was shown at the Sundance Film Festival and is currently distributed by HBO. He was the technical advisor on blindness for the television series *Blind Justice*. Manning is president of the Firehouse Theatre Company, which includes actors both with and without disabilities. He is a world-class blind Judo competitor, and he represented the United States in the 1988 Paralympics.

Photo: Christopher Voelker



ACT IV PRESENTATION: Sharing Your Work with Others

The Other Room by Adriane Baker-Dunn

Photo: Carol Pratt

Actor: Daniel Lee Townsend

ACT IV: PRESENTATION

Sharing Your Work with Others

When writing a play, playwrights follow special formats. Below are descriptions of the various formats, and on page 57 is an example of a professional dramatic manuscript.

The Title Page

The title of the play should be centered on the page. The playwright's name, school, teacher's name, city, and state, should be placed in the lower right corner.

Cast of Characters Page

This page includes all characters and indicates any double casting that may be required. Characters are described by age and relationship to other characters on this page as well. Directors and producers use this information to help them when casting. Pay attention to the margins and formatting.

Cast of Characters:

Alexa: 15	Lead member of band, and new to town
Matt: 15	Alexa's stand partner, and a popular kid
Suzie: 12	A friend of Peter's, and Alexa's sister
Peter: 13	Suzie's friend

The Play Itself

Page numbers are in the upper right corner; character names are centered and in all caps; major scenic settings and stage directions are indented toward the right margin; minor directions are in parentheses and appear within the dialogue; there are two spaces between lines of dialogue; the common font is Arial and the font size is 12.

Celebration

When a reading concludes or the curtain draws to a close, everyone—cast, director, dramaturg, writer, and audience—should stop and applaud the work. Everyone has worked hard to express themselves or help others realize their artistic vision on stage. This is difficult work. To find the words to articulate what's wanted and then to present them with artistry and integrity takes patience and great effort, and isn't easy. So applaud your fellow collaborators! Or applaud in sign language and wave both hands in the air! Stand up if the work or effort was extraordinary! Shout Bravo if you think applause does not express how much you enjoyed the work. Celebrate the accomplishments, for everyone deserves to know how great they did. ■

ACT I

1

Scene 1

A Classroom. Upstage is the door. The door leads into the hallway. The students' desks are arranged in rows of four.

It is recess time. SEAN is sitting at his desk, working very hard on his play. JILL enters classroom from the hallway and sits at the desk next to SEAN.

JILL

It was a great idea to work on our plays together today.

(pulls out a copy of her play from her backpack)

The deadline for the Playwright Discovery Award is coming up really soon.

SEAN

Jill, do you know how we are supposed to format our plays?

JILL

Mr. Smith gave me a style sheet that we can follow.

(taking out the style sheet from her backpack)

The VSA Playwright Discovery Award sent this to Mr. Smith so that we would know how to set up our scripts before we submit them.

SEAN

Thank you!

(looking up and completely changes his mood)

I was worried that I would not be able to enter my play if it wasn't formatted correctly. I'd really like to win. I can't even imagine how exciting it would be to have my play selected for full production at the Kennedy Center!

Scene 2

It's the next morning before school has started. MR. SMITH is sitting at his desk looking over some papers. SEAN and JILL enter and approach MR. SMITH.

JILL

Mr. Smith, thank you so much for giving me a copy of the VSA Playwright Discovery Award Style Sheet.

(proudly shows Mr. Smith her finished play)

I finished my play last night, and now I am ready to submit it

SEAN

My play will be done by tomorrow!

MR. SMITH

That's great to hear! If either of you are awarded full production at the Kennedy Center, we'll organize a field trip so that the entire 10th grade can see your play. In the meantime keep writing more plays. If you do not get full production this year, there is always next.

JILL and SEAN

OK, we will!

The bell rings, and SEAN and JILL go sit at their desks waiting for class to begin.



GET TO KNOW A PLAYWRIGHT: John Belluso was a writer for the stage and television and was director of the *Other Voices Project* at the Mark Taper Forum Theatre in Los Angeles. His critically acclaimed plays that focus on the disability experience are produced in regional theaters across the United States. His play *Gretty Good Time* won the VSA Playwright Discovery Award in 1998. He also wrote for the HBO television series *Deadwood* (2004). He died in 2006 at the age of 36. He was writing a play about an Iraqi war veteran with a disability called *The Poor Itch* for the Public Theater.





ACT V ASSESSMENT: Discover Your New Skills

For the Love of Goldfish by Ali Pavuk

Photo: Scott Suchman

Actor: Michael Vitaly Sazonov

ACT V: ASSESSMENT

Discover Your New Skills

To gain a sense of how students' awareness of disability has changed, complete the following assessment before beginning the [VSA Playwright Discovery Program](#) and at its end. To gain a truer sense of student learning, do not correct and discuss the assessment until the program has ended. Allowing the students to compare their first and second set of answers will provide the VSA a truer sense of the program's success. Teachers may choose to ask students to place their name on the Assessment or not. The primary goal is to identify how the class has improved awareness rather than individual growth. The Discovery Assessment Answer Key is on page 71. ■

Discovery Assessment

NAME (optional) _____ Section/Class Period _____

_____ Before beginning the Playwright Discovery program

_____ After completing the Playwright Discovery program

Language Awareness

1. What does the phrase “People First” refer to?
 - a. A program to promote understanding disability through public speaking and videos
 - b. A way to describe people with disabilities in the Constitution
 - c. A way to describe people with disabilities focusing on the individual rather than on the disability

2. Which clichés or common phrases use physical or mental disabilities to define or describe a situation?
 - a. His grades are limping along
 - b. That’s so lame
 - c. She’s such a spaz
 - d. Freak out!
 - e. Skip to my Lou, my darling

Disability as Metaphor

3. How are characters with disabilities often presented on stage, television, or film?
(Circle all that apply)
 - a. As strong individuals
 - b. As ethical individuals
 - c. As loners (we do not see them with a lot of friends)
 - d. As needing help
 - e. As outsiders
 - f. As individuals with a special gift along the lines of a superhero
 - g. As everyday people, parents, teenagers, or kids

-
4. How is disability treated on television or film? (Circle all that apply)
- a. As a problem to overcome
 - b. As something to learn more about
 - c. As a non-issue
 - d. As a unique and exciting aspect of who people are
5. Metaphor is
- a. When something is used to explain or define something else
 - b. When something known is used to explain the unknown
 - c. When something is compared to another thing using “like” or “as”

Creating Plays

6. Define *dramatic problem*
- a. A conflict within the play or a question that the main character or ensemble of characters must address
 - b. The point of no return in a play
 - c. A question the main character or ensemble of characters must address
7. Define *dramatic tension*
- a. A moment when an obstacle prevents the character from achieving a goal
 - b. When a situation is extremely difficult and people yell throughout
 - c. A part of the play where two moments work against one another
8. Define *dramatic need/want*
- a. Something a character desires
 - b. Something—an object, person, or emotion—a character must have to feel complete and actively pursues
 - c. A person a character wants and drops everything to get

-
9. Define what it means for a scene or play to have “stakes”
- The scene is meaty because it involves a want or need
 - The scene involves risk for the characters as they pursue their want or need
 - A bad thing will happen if the character’s want or need is not achieved

Dramaturgy

10. Define *dramatic plot*
- An area of land
 - Cause and effect
 - The events of a play or what happens
11. Define *dramatic story*
- A narrative told with passion and enthusiasm
 - How the plot unfolds
 - A tale with action
12. Define *dramaturgy*
- A style of theater
 - The study of dramatic structures
 - A form of turgid drama
13. Define *open question*
- A question that has no answer
 - A question that can be discussed forever
 - A question that focuses the discussion but doesn’t direct someone to the answer

>>>

Presenting a Play

14. How should a page of dialogue for a play appear on a typed page?
 - a. Name of character on left followed by a colon
 - b. Name of character centered but using upper and lower case
 - c. Name of character centered and in all CAPS
15. How should stage directions for a play appear on a typed page?
 - a. In parentheses
 - b. In italics
 - c. In a column on the right side of the page
16. When representing a person with a disability, what might a writer or actor do to prepare?
 - a. Refer to literature
 - b. Watch old films
 - c. Think about who you know who has a disability or impairment

Disability in the Arts

17. Name at least three television shows that include a character with a disability in its cast.
(Preferably not cartoons. The shows may be current or in reruns.)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
18. Name at least three films that include characters with disabilities in its cast.
(Preferably not animated films.)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

19. Name at least three writers or performers who self-identify as people with disabilities.

1.

2.

3.

20. Have you seen a play featuring a character with a disability?

_____ YES

_____ NO

If yes, please name it: _____





EPILOGUE

The Marionette Effect by Laura Hogikyan

Photo: Scott Suchman

Actor: Ian LeValley

EPILOGUE

Plays submitted to the [VSA Playwright Discovery Award Program](#) will be evaluated by a panel of professional theater artists. Below are a number of the questions and guidelines used to evaluate and rate the submitted plays. The panel discusses the top scripts to determine which one will be produced as part of the [Playwright Discovery Evening](#).

Adjudicator Guidelines from VSA

Expression of Theme

- Did the play address and incorporate the topic of disability in a meaningful way?
- Could you easily determine the nature of the disability?
- What insights were gained as a result of the playwright's exploration of the chosen theme?

Plot Development

- Was the plot thoroughly developed, and all the subplots resolved by the end of the play?
- Did the plot sustain interest throughout the play?
- Was the action paced effectively?
- Did the choice of setting contribute to plot development?

Character Portrayal

- Were the characters believable?
- Did the characters' situation elicit an emotional response: empathy, anger, amusement, etc.?
- Were the relationships between the characters effectively developed?
- Was the mix of characters (ages, backgrounds, personalities, etc.) used creatively to promote development of the overall theme?
- Did the play's dialogue reflect good language skills, a sense of natural speech patterns, and an instinct for how to express the range of human emotions? ■

Adjudicator / VSA Rating System

Plays are rated according to the following system; 1 is the lowest score, and 5, the highest.

1. TRY AGAIN

- The play presents disability as the sole dramatic problem
- The Main Character lacks a want or need
- The obstacles are simple and solved easily
- The story and problem are told to us
- The story is not unique
- The plot is obvious and predictable
- The play presents characters with disability in isolation
- The play does not follow the proper play submission format

2. PRODUCER WANTS REWRITES

- The play presents disability as the major dramatic problem
- The Main Character's wants or needs are inconsistent
- The obstacles are often solved simply and easily
- The story and problem are sometimes shown but often told to us
- The plot has some twists and turns, but is often obvious and predictable
- The play presents characters with disability in isolation
- The play inconsistently follows the proper play submission format

3. APPLAUSE-WORTHY

- The play presents disability as a contributing element to the dramatic problem
- The Main Character's wants and needs are present and shift as the character learns new facts
- The obstacles vary and work to elevate the stakes
- The story and problem are shown to us
- The plot twists and turns and sometimes presents surprises
- The play presents characters with disability in the community with others who have an apparent or non-apparent disability
- The play follows the proper play submission format

4. **CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED**

The play presents disability as a contributing element to the dramatic problem

Some of the characters learn and grow throughout the story

The stakes vary throughout but always increase the sense of mystery and interest

The story is unique and often surprising

The Main Character's secrets add to the plot twists and are always solved

The play often explores disability as a way to engage more possibilities

The play presents characters with disability in the community with others who have an apparent or non-apparent disability and those who do not

The play follows the proper play submission format

5. **A SMASH HIT!**

The play presents disability as a contributing element to the dramatic problem

Characters learn and grow throughout the story

The stakes vary throughout and increase the sense of mystery and interest

The story is unique, complex, and surprising

The lead characters' secrets add to the plot twists and are always resolved

The play explores disability as a way to engage more possibilities

The play presents characters with disability in the community with others who have an apparent or non-apparent disability and those who do not

The play follows the proper play submission format

Reading

Lewis, Victoria Ann. 1998 Summer. "The Dramaturgy of Disability." *Michigan Quarterly Review*. 15(3): 525–539.

Disability Studies Quarterly. 2004. Special Issue on "Disability Culture in Children's Literature." Vol. 24(1). www.dsqsds.org/issue/view/38.

American Theater magazine. 2001, April. Special Issue on "Access, Activism, and Art."

Organizations

Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts | www.inclusioninthearts.org

The Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts is the nation's leading advocate for full diversity as a key to the vitality and dynamism of American theater, film, and television.

National Endowment for the Arts Office for AccessAbility | www.nea.gov

The National Endowment for the Arts' Office for AccessAbility is the advocacy–technical assistance arm of the Arts Endowment to make the arts accessible for people with disabilities, older adults, veterans, and people living in institutions.

VSA, The International Organization on Arts and Disability | www.vsarts.org

VSA was founded more than 35 years ago by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith to provide arts and education opportunities for people with disabilities and increase access to the arts for all. VSA is an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Assessment Answer Key

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------|-----|--|
| 1. | C | 11. | B |
| 2. | A, B, C | 12. | B |
| 3. | B, C, D, E, F | 13. | C |
| 4. | A, B, D | 14. | C |
| 5. | A | 15. | C or A |
| 6. | A | 16. | C |
| 7. | A | 17. | Possible: LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE, GLEE,
CSI: CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION |
| 8. | B | 18. | Possible: RAIN MAN, AVATAR, STAR WARS |
| 9. | C | 19. | Possible: JOHN BELLUSO, MARLEE MATLIN, ROBERT
DAVID HALL, LYNN MANNING |
| 10. | C | 20. | Possible: A CHRISTMAS CAROL, THE ELEPHANT MAN,
THE MIRACLE WORKER |

Contributors

Lenora Inez Brown | Project Coordinator and Editor is the former Head of the Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism program at The Theatre School at DePaul University. She has worked with writers at the Sundance Theatre Lab, Pacific Playwright's Festival, The Kennedy Center's New Vision/New Voices, and other development conferences. She has developed a number of award-winning and award-nominated plays including *It Ain't Nothing But the Blues*, which received a Tony® nomination for Best Book. While working with *American Theatre* magazine, she helped curate the magazine's *first-ever* disability-focused issue, which Kathleen Tolan guest edited. She is the author of *The Art of Active Dramaturgy: Transforming Critical Thought into Dramatic Action*. She has a BA in Art History from Dartmouth College and an MFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from the Yale School of Drama.

Liz Brown | Graphic Designer is the founder of Lizebizz Graphics and former Visual Director for CakeLove, the award-winning gourmet bakery in Washington, DC. She has created innovative print and web collateral materials for leading organizations for over a decade including DeutschLA, The Cleveland Clinic Foundation, and The National Urban Alliance for Effective Education. Liz has a BFA in Illustration and Graphics from the Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA in Film from CalArts.

Jonathan Dorf | Contributor, Acts II & IV is best known for his plays for teens, which include: *4 A.M.*, *After Math*, *Thank You for Flushing My Head in the Toilet and other rarely used expressions*, *Rumors of Polar Bears*, and *High School (non) Musical*. Over 400 productions of his work have taken place throughout the United States and Canada, as well in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, and Asia. He is the co-founder of YouthPLAYS, an online publisher of plays for young people. He authored *Young Playwrights 101*, a complete textbook for young playwrights and those who teach them, and *Playwriting101.com*, Google's top-ranked playwriting site. He holds a BA from Harvard University and an MFA in Playwriting from UCLA.

Dr. Carrie Sandahl | Contributor, Act I is an Associate Professor in the Department of Disability and Human Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is the head of the new Program on Disability Art, Culture, and Humanities, which is devoted to research on and the creation of disability art. This program also serves as the new administrative home for Chicago's Bodies of Work, an organization that supports city-wide disability arts festivals and that promotes disability arts and culture year-round. Carrie has published numerous research articles and an anthology she co-edited with Philip Auslander, entitled *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, garnered the Association for Theatre in Higher Education's award for Outstanding Book in Theatre Practice and Pedagogy in 2006.

Christopher Simler | Contributor, Act I is the Chief Executive Officer and Disability Outreach Consultant for Integrated Behavioral Systems, Inc., and is an Adjunct Professor at Elmhurst College. He has written several articles, which have been published in the magazines for the Foster Care Support Network and Adult Family Caregivers Network, among others. Christopher has designed new teaching methodologies and restructured the environments in both public and private schools' behavioral and transition programs. ■

Postcards

These postcards may be photocopied for students working on **PLAYWRITING EXERCISE 3**.

Illustrations by: E. Brown



Postcard 1

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Postcard 2

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Postcard 3

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Postcard 4

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Postcard 5

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VSA, the international organization on arts and disability, was founded more than 35 years ago by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith to provide arts and education opportunities for people with disabilities and increase access to the arts for all. With 52 international affiliates and a network of nationwide affiliates, VSA is changing perceptions about people with disabilities around the world. Each year, 7 million people of all ages and abilities participate in VSA programs, which cover all artistic genres. VSA is an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

VSA

818 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20006

202.628.2800 • 800.933.8721 (Voice) • 202.737.0645 (TTY) • 202.429.0868 (Fax)

vsarts.org • facebook.com/VSAInternational



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