



## Project Overview

For grades 9–12, TheatreWorks Young Playwrights Project pairs Bay Area high school students with a professional TheatreWorks theatre artist for two months to learn the craft of dramatic writing. The project then culminates in a festival of staged readings of the plays, staged and performed by professional actors and directors.

**THE BEGINNING:** Students learn about the fundamentals of writing a ten-minute play.

### How to get started:

- Students explore what can happen in ten minutes. An example assignment is for students to set a timer for ten minutes at three different times and three different spaces over a week. They write a short description of what occurred in their journals. It is through this exercise that students begin to learn that nothing and everything can happen in ten minutes.

### Where ideas come from:

- Students are encouraged to write about their own world and what is happening in it. Stories can come from one of three directions: from a character, from an issue, and from a situation. In our early classes, these young artists start bouncing around their ideas with their classmates and the resident TheatreWorks theatre artist.

### How to build a play:

- Once writers have a starting place, we begin to explore play structure. Students learn Freytag's Pyramid (stasis, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, new stasis) and The Hero's Journey (Safe, Need, Go, Search, Find Take, Return, New Safe.) Learning about different ways to approach structure encourages students own voice and their storytelling style.

**THE MIDDLE:** Student begin to put their ideas on paper. We explore and build their play in thirds: the first three pages, the middle three pages, the last three pages. Each third receives a few class periods for students to share their work and receive feedback.

### The first three pages:

- Students craft their opening 15 seconds. What happens before any dialogue is spoken? What do we see on the stage? What is necessary for us as an audience to notice in this early moment of your story? How can a character's first entrance further your storytelling? An example assignment is for students to write three different versions of their opening moments.

- Once they have a solid idea of their opening, students share their first pages. Their scripts are read aloud in class where they receive feedback from their fellow students, their class teacher, and the TheatreWorks resident theatre artist.
- It is during this stage that students learn how to receive and implement feedback. They also learn how to give feedback to their peers that is critical yet encouraging and leaves the power in the writer's hands.

#### **The middle three pages:**

- Once students have a solid opening to their play, they continue their story and begin building to its climax.
- Writers are now developing character and are encouraged to try taking their story in different directions before committing to one path.

#### **The last three pages:**

- Once students have written the first two thirds of their play, they are encouraged to explore different endings to their piece. What do we see as the lights are fading? What is the last word spoken? How can your last moments leave an impression on the audience?
- Students craft their final pages and share their drafts. Their full pieces are read aloud in class where they receive feedback from their fellow students, their class teacher, and the TheatreWorks resident theatre artist.

**THE END:** In the final stages of the program, 6-8 plays from the class are chosen for further development. The writers in this group continue crafting their pieces with the TheatreWorks resident theatre artist. This work then culminates with a staged reading festival directed by Bay Area professional directors and a cast of professional actors.

#### **Who moves forward:**

- Once students have finished their full drafts, the resident theatre artist and teacher choose which plays will be produced in a festival of staged readings. Only 6-8 can be chosen for further work.

#### **The last classes:**

- In the last class periods, the group of selected playwrights continue to finesse and massage their work. At this stage, they are readying their play to hand to a director and a cast.
- The feedback they are receiving now is more focused and specific, examining their piece moment by moment.

#### **The Staged Readings Festival:**

- The program culminates in a festival of staged readings of these new works. Bay Area professional directors and actors rehearse at a quick pace to get the works on their feet.
- The playwrights get to see their plays in the hands of artists that respect and cherish new work in a festival shared with family and friends.