Genre Study: One-Act Plays Jessica Soulier

Rationale: Genre Studies

Giving students the opportunity to read, study, analyze, and write within a specific genre will result in students demonstrating mastery of the genre. According to Calkins, teaching genre is the best way to get students to grow as writers (357). A genre study makes it easy for a student to learn to write in a specific genre. By reading an array of examples from the chosen genre, students become familiar with the genre and its characteristics. They are able to define the genre's traits, such as form, characteristics, features, and style. Through their direct involvement in reading examples of the genre, students can eventually be expected to have the knowledge and ability to produce their own work within the genre. According to Randy Bomer, all people have an innate sense of "how this type of thing is supposed to go," what he calls a "genre schema," which has been developed from our social contact, reading, and hearing. This genre schema causes us to make assumptions about what we are about to read before even reading it. It is this same sense of genre that gives direction to our writing. Bomer suggests, then, that a class should "take a particular literary genre for a time as a broad object of inquiry," which will allow students to write about what is personal to them while exploring the genre (116-119).

Numerous genres are appropriate for an all-class genre study, as long as they are authentic. Bomer defines authentic genres as those that are encountered in "an authentic reading life." That is, students encounter this genre in daily life. Furthermore, Bomer advocates that the boundaries of the genre be wide, encompassing many forms of the genre, rather than the specific. For example, if conducting a genre study on poetry, the students could focus on any form of poetry they choose, rather than one specific type. (122). Therefore, the possibilities of genres are endless. This genre study will focus on the one-act play.

Rationale: One-Act plays

Why would a teacher want to use a one-act play genre study in the classroom? In response to Bomer's call to authenticity, the one-act play is easily defendable. Drama has been a staple of literature education for hundreds of years. Drama is found in every library, on every classroom bookshelf, and in every English textbook. Furthermore, drama surrounds the students each day on the television, in sitcoms, movies, and cartoons. I have refined the genre of drama down to the genre of the one-act play in order to allow the students to read numerous plays in a short amount of time. However, the boundaries of the genre are still wide. Students are able to read long one-act plays and shorter ten-minute plays. They also have the choice of subject matter.

The one-act play is to a full-length play what the short story is to the novel. When teaching a student to read and write stories, the short-story is a more logical place to start than the novel. Likewise, it is logical to introduce students to the one-act play, which will develop competency with drama, before expecting them to be able to perform with full-length works. Within the genre of the one-act play I am including the sub-genre of the ten-minute play. The ten-minute play made its debut in 1977 at the Actors Theatre of Louisville's "Humana Festival of New American Plays." In recent years the ten-minute

play has risen as an accepted art form. Because of their extreme brevity, ten-minute plays often relies heavily on metaphor and implies meaning rather than explaining it. There is no time for an exposition in a ten-minute play. Rather, the play starts in mid-action and it is the job of the audience to figure out what is going on (Lane, et al., vii-viii). If one-act plays are like short stories, then ten-minute plays are "American theater's haikus" (Lane, et al., vii). The brevity of the ten-minute play is particularly appealing when students display short attention spans. Ten-minute plays are useful in the classroom because though they are the size of an excerpt they are fully developed in story and character. Therefore, they act as an "exciting crash course" in drama. Many can be covered in several class periods, giving students an array of texts to serve as references for their own work. Drama gives students many opportunities to learn and work with various literary elements. Symbolism, imagery, and metaphor are all prominent in one-act plays (metaphor is particularly popular in ten-minute plays). They will become familiar with plot, conflict, and theme. Students will also discover what composes a believable character by reading plays featuring interesting characterization. Students will learn to create effective dialogue and experiment with dialect. In response to their exposure to these elements, students will practice their writing skills and will be able to write their own one-act plays using these elements with a sense of mastery.

The one-act play genre study addresses the NYS ELA standards. The students will be writing for social interaction. The playwrights will be creating characters, plots, and conflicts that are universal, as it is crucial that the audience is able to relate to the play. The final stage of the study is publication. The students will need to be aware of their audience (are they writing for children, their peers, or the community?), and in turn will create their plays accordingly. In turn, they will be communicating their message to their audience. Students will present, orally and in writing, opinions and judgments through the various perspectives of their characters, which applies to Standard 3, critical analysis and expression. Standard 2, literary response and expression, is addressed through the students' freedom of self-expression and artistic creation in their writing.

According to Smith and Wilhelm, in *Going With the Flow*, students need to experience a "flow experience" in order to enjoy and fully involve themselves in an activity. In order to have a "flow experience," the following conditions must be met:

- Students must have a sense of control and competence
- Students must face an appropriate challenge
- Students need clear goals and immediate feedback
- Students need a focus on the immediate experience
- Students need to socially engage one another through the activity (engage in socialization) (3-16)

This study addresses each of these conditions. Frontloading will make students aware that they live in a world of drama. They will discover that they have knowledge of drama from the television and movies that they watch. They will get plenty of practice, first reading in the genre, watching it, and then writing in it. Students will read numerous examples of one-act plays and from these examples they will collaboratively list the characteristics of the genre, which will give them a sense of competence and control. The one-act play is an appropriate challenge for teenagers. Since full-length plays may be daunting, one-act plays make for a more logical starting point. One-act plays exist at many different levels of complexity. You should allow the students to choose which

plays they want to read, which will enable them to challenge themselves appropriately. Make the goals of the genre study immediately known to the students – to learn the form and function of one-act plays, to develop a mastery of skills, and to compose an original work, with publication or performance being the end result. The students will receive immediate feedback by working with group members and participating in peer-revision sessions. The students will focus on and enjoy the immediate experience by reading the plays in class and in character as well as by performing their own work live. Working in groups, they will be communicating and socializing through the sharing of opinions and ideas. When sharing or performing their own works, the students will be able to share these ideas and opinions with an even wider audience.

Procedure for Conducting a Genre Study on One-Act Plays

Randy Bomer sets up a series of guidelines for conducting a genre study in *Time for Meaning* (122-132), from which the following procedure is adapted.

Prior to starting the genre study it is crucial that the students have writers' notebooks. They will be creating their own plays at the end of the study, and the notebooks will therefore serve to hold the ideas that they will be collecting over the course of the study. Throughout the study, encourage students to record any ideas that may pop into their minds – anything they may want to write about. They should also be encouraged to jot down interesting things they hear and see, which will be helpful in the creation of characters and dialogue. Anything goes in the writer's notebook – thoughts, ideas, dreams, observations, memories, and even shopping lists. Provide your students with a sample writer's notebook (your own!) so they can see how you, an experienced writer, constantly takes notes, makes observations, and writes down ideas. Prior to beginning the writing stage, instruct students to begin writing down snippets of the things that they hear in their day-to-day activities. These small snippets of dialogue will be used in mini-lesson #1, which occurs after the writing process begins.

Start the one-act play genre study with a frontloading exercise, which will establish a sense of competency in the students. According to Bomer, everyone has a "literate genre schema," or a "sense of 'how this type of thing tends to go" (116). Explain to students that they are constantly in the midst of drama. Television shows, movies, and radio programs are all forms of drama. They may also recognize that forms of drama can be found on the Internet from sites such as YouTube. Therefore, students already have expectations of the one-act plays that they will be reading. They expect that there will be a plot with some sort of conflict, they expect well-developed characters, and they expect dialogue. They already know a lot about the genre. Activity:

Ask students to list the characteristics of drama. They should be able to come up with a list that includes the following at least: characters, plot, dialogue, and setting. Once the class has established a rudimentary list of the characteristics of drama, return to the popular culture. At this point, ask students to describe the settings of their favorite shows, the characterizations of their favorite characters, and the plot of their favorite episode. For example, have the class watch a small clip from the television show "South Park." Have them spend a few moments talking about the clip. Ask students to describe the characterization of Eric Cartman. Have them talk about his appearance, habits, and

temperament. Get the students to address dialogue and dialect by asking them to discuss the manner in which the characters speak to each other. How is the dialogue on "South Park" different from the dialogue on other shows and why? They could do this for many characters or just one. Then have them state the show's setting and the characteristics of this setting – in this case they may mention that it is rural and always winter. Ask them why the setting is important. They could then address the plot of an episode, making note of the exposition, the conflict, and the solution. At the end of this session students will feel that they know a great deal about drama (and they do!), and will in turn have a sense of competence and control.

After their brief introduction to the drama genre, the class will need to take on several one-act plays as keystone texts. These texts will introduce the students to the genre of one-act plays. From these texts the students will derive a working definition of the genre, so the texts need to exemplify the characteristics that you wish for them to make note of. These keystone texts will serve as reference points for future work and will be returned to numerous times throughout the genre study. In order to "draw [the students] under the genre's spell," it is important to begin by reading an example that "knocks [their] socks off" (Calkins, 364). Choose a text that is contemporary and relevant to the students. When you provide the students with a great example, it is far more likely that they will become interested in the genre and acquire the desire to pursue the genre study. It is best to start with a shorter piece and work up to longer, more complex works as students become more familiar with the genre. Start the study with several ten-minute plays or extremely short one-acts. Then move on to longer one-act plays.

Appendix A provides lists of ten-minute and one-act plays that are appropriate for the classroom.

It is important that students discover for themselves the components of the genre. You can use "While the Auto Waits" by O. Henry, "Trifles" by Susan Glaspell, and "Riders to the Sea" by J. M. Synge as touchstone texts. These plays, in the order they are listed, gradually increase in length and complexity.

Plays are meant to be performed. Therefore, students should read these plays aloud. Students should be assigned parts. Since one-act plays have a minimal number of characters, not all students will get to participate each day. It is important to make sure that each student gets to read for at least one character, however. This provides them with an experience in public speaking and acting.

So, what exactly is a one-act play?

After students have been exposed to a number of one-act plays, have the students break into small groups of no more than four to come up with a list of characteristics of one-act plays. Then have the class collaboratively create a list of characteristics of one-act plays. They already have a basic list of characteristics from the frontloading activity, which includes:

- Characters/Characterization
- Dialogue
- Setting
- Plot/Conflict/Resolution

These characteristics listed above are standard for all one-act plays.

Students should now be able to add to this list. They should come up with:

- Brevity the action of one-act plays occurs in a concise manner, the plays range in time from ten minutes to about an hour.
- Unity of action the action flows continuously without breaks
- Unity of time the action of the play often occurs in real-time
- Unity of place one-act plays generally have a single setting. Setting often creates a mood for the play.
- Lack of exposition the play jumps into immediate action
- Minimal number of characters
- Focus on one incident
- Characters may occasionally speak in dialect

These characteristics are common in one-act plays, but are not exactly requirements. These traits are sometimes experimented with or disregarded completely. Make sure that students are aware of these traits and are also aware that they are not set in stone.

They should also address the characteristics of the formal qualities of one-act plays:

- Use of stage directions
- When speaking, character names are completely uppercase, followed by a colon
- The title is followed by the cast of characters, followed by a comment on the setting in italics

After class collaboration, you should add any of these points that the students failed to mention. After this, have the students attempt to establish a definition of the one-act play genre as a class. The result should be something like the following:

"One-act plays are a brief glimpse into a specific moment in time, which makes use of a minimal number of characters to focus on the immediate action of a single incident." You should then provide the class with a hand-out that lists the characteristics and the class definition (included, **Appendix B**). This class collaboration and "creation" of knowledge through creating a definition will enhance the students' sense of control over the genre.

The one-act play is a miniature version of typical full-length dramas. The running time of a one-act play is almost always less than an hour. Because of its time confinements, the one-act play captures a brief moment in time. The exposition of the one-act play is very brief, immersing the reader/viewer into the action very rapidly. Louis E. Catron likens the one-act play to "a high-speed photograph of the split-second instant that an object drops into a fluid, causing a diadem of droplets to spray into the air: From that moment you can infer what the fluid was like before the object struck, the force of the object and what it did to the fluid, where the droplets will go, and what the fluid will become later" (42). The "object" is the conflict and the action of the play represents the lives of the characters. Therefore, the one-act play is the depiction of a moment that encapsulates and defines the lives of the characters. As a rule, one-act plays have a minimal number of characters. Given the time constraints of the one-act, characterization becomes thinner as the number of characters increases. With a minimal cast of characters, characterization is well-developed. Generally, one-act plays demonstrate unity of action, place and time, with linear action occurring in one setting in real-time. The most successful one-act plays are sharply focused on a significant incident, with action

compressed to focus on the most important details, and characters are well characterized and fully developed (Catron, 42-43).

A one-act play differs from a full-length play in many ways. The most obvious is length; the one-act is significantly shorter. Full-length plays often feature disparities in time, action, and setting. Various acts allow for breaks and jumps in the action, scene changes, flash backs and flash forwards, and various other techniques. While the action of a one-act play typically takes place in the amount of time that it takes to perform it, the action of a full-length play may take place over the course of days, weeks, or years. The plot of the full-length play is significantly more complex than that of the one-act play, with many things happening at once and often several sub-plots surfacing as well. With the longer, more complex plot, there will often be numerous characters as well. Some of these characters will be extremely complex (often the hero or heroine), but many other characters will be minimally characterized. According to Catron, these plays have "one major through-line conflict... [that] starts early at the point of attack, is continually refreshed and refocused with complications, and finally reaches its peak at the climax" (45). One-act plays, on the other hand, are concise and better packaged for immediate classroom use.

Now that the class has established a list of the characteristics of the one-act play genre, it is important to explore these characteristics using the touchstone texts. The following can be discussed using each text:

"While the Auto Waits"

- Setting –it is important that the entire play takes place on a park bench. Only in this location were the characters safe to keep their secrets.
- Brevity the whole play takes place in about ten minutes
- Unity of action and time the play runs in real-time. The length of the encounter of the two characters is the same as the length of the play. We do not jump forward or backward in time.
- Unity of place the entire play takes place on a park bench.
- Plot The plot is quickly developed. The reader / viewer is exposed to a shocking twist ending (resolution).
- Characterization we can learn a lot about the characters through their actions.
- Minimal number of characters (majority of play focuses on the dialogue of two characters).
- Focus on one incident the whole focus of the play is the conversation on the bench.

"Trifles"

- Plot elaborate murder mystery plot.
- Characterization the women of the play end up banding together. Why do they do this?
- Setting the rural, isolated setting certainly had an effect on Mrs. Wright.
- Lack of Exposition we immediately know a murder has occurred. Through the dialogue we are exposed to the background information.
- Resolution we come to discover that Mrs. Wright was (maybe) justified in her murdering of Mr. Wright.

"Riders to the Sea"

- Setting the play could only take place on their island. It wouldn't make sense anywhere else. They characters interact directly with the setting, and the men are consumed by it. The isolated setting also establishes a mood of depression and fear.
- Lack of exposition we learn of the family's history through the dialogue. When the play opens, tragedy has already struck.
- Dialect when read aloud you can hear the Irish accents.
- Plot the plot is thick and well-developed.

I have provided two activities that will help students understand the development of character and setting (**Appendices C and D**). For these mini-lessons, as well as with the crafting of the play, it is important that the teacher works along with the students, completing the writing assignments as well. The students need to see the teacher as a "colearner." By working along side the students, the teacher is able to demonstrate the habits and techniques employed by skilled writers. "Thinking out loud" and writing in front of the students demonstrates the way in which writers make decisions. Furthermore, creating works along with the students will enable them to see that ordinary people are writers too (Bomer, 123-124).

Appendix C, "Developing Character," is adapted from "Creating Characterisation for Scenes in Drama" (available at http://drama-education.suite101.com). Provide students with three piles of magazine and newspaper cutouts. Pile one should contain images of men, women, and children (or animals, robots, etc., if desired). Students will choose an image from this pile and develop it as their character. Pile two should be composed of buildings/shelters. These will serve as inspiration for choosing a home, place of employment, or type of upbringing for the character. Students need to choose on image from this pile and use it as inspiration in developing the character. The third pile should contain newspaper headlines that serve as "critical life events." These headlines should serve as inspiration for why the character behaves the way that he or she does. Instruct students to select one image from each pile and answer the questions on Appendix E. They will describe their character physically, mentally, and emotionally. They will think about their character's lifestyle: employment, marital status, schooling, and more, and hopefully begin to realize that there are underlying reasons that cause a character to behave in a specific manner. After answering the questions, instruct students to work in pairs to create a conversation between their two characters. Give the class a situation (for example, "Your character is seated next to your partner's character on a bus") and allow them to write the dialogue that will occur.

Appendix D asks students to take their hypothetical character and place him or her into a specific setting. Through the exercise, students will realize that attention to setting is an important element of playwriting. They will consider why their character should be in a setting, how the setting affects the character, and how the character will interact with the setting.

Now is also an appropriate time to include an assignment that prepares students for the NYS Regents exam. I have prepared an assignment that makes use of Synge's "Riders to the Sea" and Wadsworth's poem "Excelsior." The students are required to write an analytical essay regarding theme. The assignment is included (**Appendix E**)

It is important that students not only read one-act plays, but get to watch them as well, since drama is intended to be performed. If possible, schedule a field trip to watch a live performance. Show clips from plays in class. Search the internet for examples. YouTube has many clips from both professional and amateur productions. A college production of "While the Auto Waits" can be found on YouTube in three parts and a professional production of "Riders to the Sea" is available on YouTube in five parts. Both "Trifles" and "Riders to the Sea" are available in film version and can be purchased for classroom use. It is important that students see the way characters are portrayed, how they interact with each other, the way setting is used, and how stage directions are put into action.

At this point allow the students to choose their own texts. Bomer suggests allowing the students to find their own examples of texts to bring in for classroom use (124). However, since it is difficult to find one-act plays that are interesting, relevant, and school-appropriate, I suggest providing the students with a list of possible titles instead. Each student should be expected to choose several hours' worth of reading. This could occur in any combination of ten-minute plays and one-act plays of various lengths. After reading their selections, students should complete a brief assignment that a) shows that the student did indeed read the works, b) helps the student recognize the ways the list of characteristics are used in the plays, and c) provides useful information for his classmates. I have provided a sample assignment (Appendix F). By completing this assignment, students will do more than just complete the works. They will have also increased their competency within the genre, their understanding of its characteristics. their familiarity with quality works and their experience with public speaking. Require students to read four works in any combination of one-act and ten minute plays that they desire, as long as they do indeed read both types. After each reading, have students prepare their response in class (Appendix F) and present a brief "play-talk" to the class. You should provide the students with a sample "play-talk" that you have prepared. It would be most beneficial to the students if you do the talk on one of the touchstone texts, so they can see how you used the elements of play in your "play-talk."

Students are now prepared to craft their own plays. Ideally, students should be able to write about what interests them and what is relevant to them. For this reason, students should not work in groups. Each student will write his or her own play. Being forced to write on a topic in which they are not interested may result in rejection of the assignment. So I recommend that you allow the student to write on any topic they desire. Prior to writing, have the students complete the brainstorming activity. Instruct students to go through their writer's notebooks for inspiration. The assignment sheet which includes questions for brainstorming is attached (**Appendix G**).

It is important to use a grading rubric that is tailored specifically to one-act plays. This way, students will be graded on their knowledge of the intricacies of the genre, not just their writing ability. A grading rubric is included (**Appendix H**). With this rubric, it is possible to assess the students' competency and ability with each of the characteristics associated with a one-act play.

The writing process will take nine to ten days, including both mini-lessons and revision time. After completing the brainstorming activity, give students one full class period to begin writing and developing their ideas. On the second day of in-class writing, interrupt to introduce mini-lesson # 1 (**Appendix I**) – Writing Dialogue. The mini-lesson

focuses on dramatic ellipses, diction, and the need to pay attention to real-life dialogue. These exercises will help the students pay attention to real life. They will not only "write" their characters, but "listen" to them as well (Hatcher, 133). You should participate in this (and all) mini-lesson along with the students, which will remind them that you are a colearner and also help guide them by showing them the things that good writers do. In the activity, students will need to make reference to the snippets of dialogue that they have been recording in their writing journals. This will give students a context in which to explore dialogue. They will learn how both the physical and vocal actions of a character convey meaning. In turn, the students are developing new perspectives by trying on "different masks," and learning about themselves (Shosh, 70, 73). This will give students a new goal for their writing: creating exciting, believable dialogue. Students will already have a good idea where their plot is headed, so this is a good time to draw their focus back to characterization.

It is important that the plays are written in a multiple-draft process. After minilesson # 1, give the students another full class day to write. The following day should be spent conducting a peer-review session. Revision is an invaluable skill that will greatly improve the quality of the students' plays. After practicing the process of revision here, students will be able to apply it to various genres. Furthermore, they will compose stronger, more entertaining plays that are more likely to adhere to conventions and formalities than the first-draft versions.

During the peer-review process, students will receive feedback from other students. Have the students exchange their plays. Each student will revise one play. In this manner, plays will be exchanged amongst partners for reviewing and each student will do his or her own revisions. This is beneficial to the individual students, who are getting experience in editing. The peer-review questionnaire is attached (**Appendix J**).

After the peer-review session provide the students with another full day of writing and revising. On the following day introduce mini-lesson # 2 (Appendix K) – Stage Directions and Stage Business. What we see is just as important as what we hear. Students need to remember that plays are meant to be performed, so the movements and actions of their characters are just as important as what they say. Stage directions and stage business are both important aspects of the conventional structure of drama. Following the mini-lesson, students should write the final copy of their play. Give them two class days to write. Along with their revisions in response to the peer-review, students will also focus on showing action through stage directions and stage business.

After the students have made their revisions, the plays are ready to be revised by the teacher. At this point, your comments should be mostly focused on conventions and mechanics – the final tweaks to get the plays up to publication level. Students should make any finishing touches at this point. Return the plays to the students promptly and give them a final in-class day to tweak their plays.

Finally, it is time for publishing. Creating a booklet is a must. Students will be thrilled to see their hard work forever immortalized. If funds are available, do make at the very least enough copies for the entire class. The students could all receive copies of their own – they would cherish it forever. A copy could be donated to the school library or community library. At the least, have a booklet made for the classroom. But don't forget, plays are meant to be performed. Schedule a night of theater. Have students vote on several of their favorite classmate-written plays which they would like to perform.

Encourage the students to acquire or make costumes and props. Advertise the theater night around the school and community. Have the students create fliers, posters, and articles for the newspaper. A live performance is the ultimate form of social interaction. The performance of their plays will be a memorable and cherished experience.

At the very end of the genre study, after publication and performance, students need to reflect on the unit. Doing so will get students to think about their experiences and growth as a writer. They will be encouraged to vocalize and internalize their control of the genre. Furthermore, the student reflections will allow the teacher to improve upon the genre study in the future. A sample reflection worksheet is attached (**Appendix L**).

Appendix A

List of Ten-Minute Plays

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"Hold for Three," Sherry Kramer
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- "Duet for Bear and Dog," Sybil Rosen
- "The Weed Dreams," Erik Kaiser
- "The Pink Fancy," Nick Zagone
- "Bloody Mary," Greg Vovos
- "The Swan Song," Anton Chekov
- "The Sun," John Galsworthy
- "Scream," Greg Vovos
- "The Sculptor's Funeral," Willa Cather
- "Down the River," Mark Twain
- "While the Auto Waits," O. Henry
- "The Lightning Rod Man," Herman Melville

See also:

http://www.10-minute-plays.com/index.html

http://www.theatrehistory.com/plays/10minute.html

Lane, Eric and Nina Shengold, eds. *Take Ten: New 10-Minute Plays*. New York: Vintage, 1997. Print.

List of One-Act Plays

- "Sherlock Holmes in the Adventure of the Dying Detective," Richard France
- "Nathan the Nervous," O. B. Rozell
- "Grandpa and the Statue," Arthur Miller
- "The Intruder," Maurice Maeterlink
- "The Boor," Anton Chekov
- "Sure Thing," David Ives
- "Trifles," Susan Glaspell
- "The Zoo Story," Edward Albee
- "The Chairs," Eugene Ionesco
- "Riders to the Sea," J. M. Synge
- "The Apple," Jimmy Brunelle
- "Slaying Bob Marley and the Minion of Babylon," Jimmy Brunelle

See also:

http://www.jimmybrunelle.com/playshighschool.html

http://www.theatrehistory.com/plays/oneact.html

Jennings, Coleman A. and Gretta Berghammer, eds. *Theater for Youth: Twelve Plays with Mature Themes*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. Print.

Appendix B

Genre Study: One-Act Plays

Be sure to include this hand-out in your notes!

Class definition of a one-act play:

"One-act plays are a brief glimpse into a specific moment in time, which makes use of a minimal number of well-developed characters to focus on one the immediate action of a single incident."

Characteristics that are present in all one-act plays:

- Minimal number of developed characters
- **Dialogue** dialogue is written in the following conventions:

CHARACTER NAME: Dialogue.

Dramatic ellipses, stage directions, and stage business all interrupt the written dialogue

- **Setting** the setting is always relevant to the play; it serves some purpose
- Plot
- Conflict
- The conflict is **resolved** in some way
- There is a **lack of exposition** and the viewer is introduced to the action immediately
- **Brevity** the play's length is kept to a minimum and covers a brief span of time (Ten minutes minimum to about an hour maximum)
- Use of **stage directions** and **stage business** to show the reader what the actors/characters are doing physically
- The title is followed by the cast of characters, followed by a summary of the setting

Characteristics that are present in most, but not all, one-act plays:

- **Plot/Conflict** that focuses on **one incident**.
- Unity of action action is continuous and chronological
- Unity of time the action takes place in real-time as it is performed
- Unity of place one-act plays generally have a single setting
- Characters sometimes make use of **dialect**
- Setting is sometimes used to establish a mood in the play

Developing Character

This is an exercise in creating characters. You will be building a character, paying careful attention to characterization. (*This character does not necessarily need to be in your play*). Use your selected images as much as possible to influence your responses. Use your imagination for the rest!

Is your character male or female? What is your character's name?

What is your character's age?

(Consider: age will influence knowledge, beliefs, vocabulary, etc.).

What does your character look like?

Hair:

Complexion or features:

Clothing:

Other important characteristics:

Where does your character live? Does your character work? Where?

What was your character's upbringing like?

(Consider: how will upbringing affect your character?)

How does your character act? What are his or her habits or hobbies?

How does your character interact with others?

(Consider: this will have an effect on the way your character makes use of dialogue.)

Look at the newspaper headline you chose. How has your character's life been affected by this event? What are your character's motives in life?

Appendix D

Developing Setting

Where will your action take place? That can easily be answered. Just ask yourself:

- Where is my character likely to be found?
- What elements of setting are crucial to the story that I want to tell?

Once you have decided on your setting you can address the following prompts to develop your setting more fully.

What is your setting?

Why is your character here?

In what ways will your character interact with the setting?

Does the setting affect the mood of the play?

Exercise: Write a brief scene (one page max.) in which your character interacts (dialogue) with:

- A. A senile old man OR
- B. A little girl with a yellow balloon OR
- C. A stray dog

Refer to the above questions to establish a likely setting. In your scene make sure to address the reason why your character is in this setting. Show one example (likely through stage directions) of your character interacting with this setting.

Appendix E Incorporating NYS Regents Exam into Genre Study

If your students are preparing to take the NYS Regents Exam, it is important to include a sample Regents task in the genre study. The following assignment addresses Part A of Session Two, in which students are asked to read two passages and then write an essay with a "controlling idea" about a theme that is prevalent in both works.

The following assignment asks students to write an essay comparing the ideas of human nature and determination in LM. Synge's play "Riders to the See" and Henry Wadsworth

The following assignment asks students to write an essay comparing the ideas of human nature and determination in J.M. Synge's play "Riders to the Sea" and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Excelsior." This assignment would logically come after having read and discussed "Riders to the Sea" in class, using it as a class keystone text.

Assignment: Read J.M. Synge's one-act play "Riders to the Sea" and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Excelsior." After reading, answer the following questions. Then write an essay comparing the two works. Be sure to include a **controlling idea** (or thesis) about human nature and determination. Make sure to use quotations from the two works to support your claims.

- 1. How are the two works similar?
- 2. Why does Bartley, in "Riders to the Sea," decide to go to sea, despite the probability of being killed?
- 3. Look up the word "excelsior." What is the definition? Be sure to choose the definition that applies to the poem.
- 4. Why do you the young man in "Excelsior" decide to climb the mountain despite warnings from various individuals and knowledge of the dangers of the mountain? What evidence suggests this?
- 5. What can you infer about the character of each young man?

"Riders to the Sea" by J. M. Synge

Cottage kitchen, with nets, oilskins, spinning-wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. Cathleen, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel. Nora, a young girl, puts her head in at the door.

Nora (in a low voice). Where is she?

Cathleen. She's lying down, God help her, and maybe sleeping, if she's able.

Nora comes in softly, and takes a bundle from under her shawl.

Cathleen (spinning the wheel rapidly). What is it you have?

Nora. The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal.

Cathleen stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.

Nora. We're to find out if it's Michael's they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

Cathleen. How would they be Michael's, Nora? How would he go the length of that way to the far north?

Nora. The young priest says he's known the like of it. "If it's Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got a clean burial, by the grace of God; and if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "with crying and lamenting."

The door which Nora half closed is blown open by a gust of wind.

Cathleen (*looking out anxiously*). Did you ask him would he stop Bartley going this day with the horses to the Galway fair?

Nora. "I won't stop him," says he; "but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living."

Cathleen. Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

Nora. Middling bad, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind. (She goes over to the table with the bundle.) Shall I open it now?

Cathleen. Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done (coming to the table). It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying.

Nora (goes to the inner door and listens). She's moving about on the bed. She'll be coming in a minute.

Cathleen. Give me the ladder, and I'll put them up in the turf-loft, the way she won't know of them at all, and maybe when the tide turns she'll be going down to see would he be floating from the east.

They put the ladder against the gable of the chimney; Cathleen goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft. Maurya comes from the inner room.

Maurya (looking up at Cathleen and speaking querulously). Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?

Cathleen. There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space (throwing down the turf), and Bartley will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara.

Nora picks up the turf and puts it round the pot-oven.

Maurya (sitting down on a stool at the fire). He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.

Nora. He'll not stop him, mother; and I heard Eamon Simon and Stephen Pheety and Colum Shawn saying he would go.

Maurya. Where is he itself?

Nora. He went down to see would there be another boat sailing in the week, and I'm thinking it won't be long till he's here now, for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker's tacking from the east.

Cathleen. I hear some one passing the big stones.

Nora (looking out). He's coming now, and he in a hurry.

Bartley (comes in ana looks round the room. Speaking sadly and quietly). Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara?

Cathleen (coming down). Give it to him, Nora; it's on a nail by the white boards. I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.

Nora (giving him a rope). Is that it, Bartley?

Maurya. You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards (*Bartley takes the rope*). It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up to-morrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week; for it's a deep grave we'll make him, by the grace of God.

Bartley (beginning to work with the rope). I've no halter the way I can ride down on the mare, and I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses, I heard them saying below.

Maurya. It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara.

She looks round at the boards.

Bartley. How would it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?

Maurya. If it isn't found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night. If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses, you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?

Bartley (working at the halter, to Cathleen). Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going.

Maurya. How would the like of her get a good price for a pig?

Bartley (to Cathleen). If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp. It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work.

Maurya. It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drowned with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave?

Bartley lays down the halter, takes off his old coat, and puts on a newer one of the same flannel.

Bartley (to Nora). Is she coming to the pier?

Nora (looking out). She's passing the green head and letting fall her sails.

Bartley (*getting his purse and tobacco*). I'll have half an hour to go down, and you'll see me coming again in two days, or in three days, or maybe in four days if the wind is bad.

Maurya (turning round to the fire, and putting her shawl over her head). Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?

Cathleen. It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?

Bartley (taking the halter). I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the grey pony 'ill run behind me. ... The blessing of God on you.

He goes out.

Maurya (*crying out as he is in the door*). He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world.

Cathleen. Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on everyone in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear?

Maurya takes up the tongs and begins raking the fire aimlessly without looking round.

Nora (turning towards her). You're taking away the turf from the cake.

Cathleen (crying out). The Son of God forgive us, Nora, we're after forgetting his bit of bread. (She comes over to the fire).

Nora. And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up.

Cathleen (*turning the cake out of the oven*). It's destroyed he'll be, surely. There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking for ever.

Maurya sways herself on her stool.

Cathleen (*cutting off some of the bread and rolling it in a cloth; to Maurya*). Let you go down now to the spring well and give him this and he passing. You'll see him then and the dark word will be broken, and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind.

Maurya (taking the bread). Will I be in it as soon as himself?

Cathleen. If you go now quickly.

Maurya (standing up unsteadily). It's hard set I am to walk.

Cathleen (looking at her anxiously). Give her the stick, Nora, or maybe she'll slip on the big stones.

Nora. What stick?

Cathleen. The stick Michael brought from Connemara.

Maurya (taking a stick Nora gives her). In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old

She goes out slowly. Nora goes over to the ladder.

Cathleen. Wait, Nora, maybe she'd turn back quickly. She's that sorry, God help her, you wouldn't know the thing she'd do.

Nora. Is she gone round by the bush?

Cathleen (looking out). She's gone now. Throw it down quickly, for the Lord knows when she'll be out of it again.

Nora (getting the bundle from the loft). The young priest said he'd be passing to-morrow, and we might go down and speak to him below if it's Michael's they are surely.

Cathleen (taking the bundle). Did he say what way they were found?

Nora (coming down). "There were two men," says he, "and they rowing round with poteen before the cocks crowed, and the oar of one of them caught the body, and they passing the black cliffs of the north."

Cathleen (trying to open the bundle). Give me a knife, Nora; the string's perished with the salt water, and there's a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week.

Nora (giving her a knife). I've heard tell it was a long way to Donegal.

Cathleen (*cutting the string*). It is surely. There was a man in here a while ago—the man sold us that knife—and he said if you set off walking from the rocks beyond, it would be in seven days you'd be in Donegal.

Nora. And what time would a man take, and he floating?

Cathleen opens the bundle and takes out a bit of a shirt and a stocking. They look at them eagerly.

Cathleen (in a low voice). The Lord spare us, Nora! isn't it a queer hard thing to say if it's his they are surely?

Nora. I'll get his shirt off the hook the way we can put the one flannel on the other. (*She looks through some clothes hanging in the corner.*) It's not with them, Cathleen, and where will it be?

Cathleen. I'm thinking Bartley put it on him in the morning, for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it. (*Pointing to the corner*.) There's a bit of a sleeve was of the same stuff. Give me that and it will do.

Nora brings it to her and they compare the flannel.

Cathleen. It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?

Nora (who has taken up the stocking and counted the stitches, crying out). It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?

Cathleen (taking the stocking). It's a plain stocking.

Nora. It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three-score stitches, and I dropped four of them.

Cathleen (counts the stitches). It's that number is in it (crying out). Ah, Nora, isn't it a bitter thing to think of him floating that way to the far north, and no one to keen him but the black hags that do be flying on the sea?

Nora (swinging herself half round, and throwing out her arms on the clothes). And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?

Cathleen (after an instant). Tell me is herself coming, Nora? I hear a little sound on the path.

Nora (looking out). She is, Cathleen. She's coming up to the door.

Cathleen. Put these things away before she'll come in. Maybe it's easier she'll be after giving her blessing to Bartley, and we won't let on we've heard anything the time he's on the sea.

Nora (helping Cathleen to close the bundle). We'll put them here in the corner.

They put them into a hole in the chimney corner. Cathleen goes back to the spinning-wheel.

Nora. Will she see it was crying I was?

Cathleen. Keep your back to the door the way the light 'll not be on you.

Nora sits down at the chimney corner, with her back to the door. Maurya comes in very slowly, without looking at the girls, and goes over to her stool at the other side of the fire. The cloth with the bread is still in her hand. The girls look at each other, and Nora points to the bundle of bread.

Cathleen (after spinning for a moment). You didn't give him his bit of bread?

Maurya begins to keen softly, without turning round.

Cathleen. Did you see him riding down?

Maurya goes on keening.

Cathleen (a little impatiently). God forgive you; isn't it a better thing to raise your voice and tell what you seen, than to be making lamentation for a thing that's done? Did you see Bartley, I'm saying to you?

Maurya (with a weak voice). My heart's broken from this day.

Cathleen (as before). Did you see Bartley?

Maurya. I seen the fearfulest thing.

Cathleen (*leaves her wheel and looks out*). God forgive you; he's riding the mare now over the green head, and the grey pony behind him.

Maurya (starts, so that her shawl falls back from her head and shows her white tossed hair. With a frightened voice). The grey pony behind him...

Cathleen (coming to the fire). What is it ails you at all?

Maurya (*speaking very slowly*). I've seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen since the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.

Cathleen and Nora. Uah.

They crouch down in front of the old woman at the fire.

Nora. Tell us what it is you seen.

Maurya. I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the red mare with the grey pony behind him (she puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes). The Son of God spare us, Nora!

Cathleen. What is it you seen?

Maurya. I seen Michael himself.

Cathleen (*speaking softly*). You did not, mother. It wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he's got a clean burial, by the grace of God.

Maurya (a little defiantly). I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare, and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the grey pony, and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

Cathleen (begins to keen). It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

Nora. Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living?

Maurya (*in a low voice, but clearly*). It's little the like of him knows of the sea. ... Bartley will be lost now, and let you call in Eamon and make me a good coffin out of the white boards, for I won't live after them. I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house—six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world— and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them. ... There were Stephen and Shawn were lost in the great wind, and found after in the Bay of Gregory of the Golden Mouth, and carried up the two of them on one plank, and in by that door.

She pauses for a moment, the girls start as if they heard something through the door that is half open behind them.

Nora (in a whisper). Did you hear that, Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the north-east?

Cathleen (in a whisper). There's some one after crying out by the seashore.

Maurya (continues without hearing anything). There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it— it was a dry day, Nora—and leaving a track to the door.

She pauses again with her hand stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneeling down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads.

Maurya (half in a dream, to Cathleen). Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?

Cathleen. Michael is after being found in the far north, and when he is found there how could he be here in this place?

Maurya. There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was in it.

Cathleen. It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north.

She reaches out and hands Maurya the clothes that belonged to Michael. Maurya stands up slowly, and takes them in her hands. Nora looks out.

Nora. They're carrying a thing among them, and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

Cathleen (in a whisper to the women who have come in). Is it Bartley it is?

One of the Women. It is, surely, God rest his soul.

Two younger women come in and pull out the table. Then men carry in the body of Bartley, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table.

Cathleen (to the women as they are doing so). What way was he drowned?

One of the Women. The grey pony knocked him over into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.

Maurya has gone over and knelt down at the head of the table. The women are keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement. Cathleen and Nora kneel at the other end of the table. The men kneel near the door.

Maurya (raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her). They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. ... I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. (*To Nora*). Give me the Holy Water, Nora; there's a small sup still on the dresser.

Nora gives it to her.

Maurya (drops Michael's clothes across Bartley's feet, and sprinkles the Holy Water over him). It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time, surely. It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking.

She kneels down again, crossing herself, and saying prayers under her breath.

Cathleen (to an old man). Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael would be found, and I have a new cake you can eat while you'll be working.

The Old Man (looking at the boards). Are there nails with them?

Cathleen. There are not, Colum; we didn't think of the nails.

Another Man. It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already.

Cathleen. It's getting old she is, and broken.

Maurya stands up again very slowly and spreads out the pieces of Michael's clothes beside the body, sprinkling them with the last of the Holy Water.

Nora (*in a whisper to Cathleen*). She's quiet now and easy; but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well. It's fonder she was of Michael, and would anyone have thought that?

Cathleen (*slowly and clearly*). An old woman will be soon tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days herself is after crying and keening, and making great sorrow in the house?

Maurya (puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on Bartley's feet). They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn (bending her heaa); and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.

She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away.

Maurya (continuing). Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.

She kneels down again and the curtain falls slowly.

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"Excelsior" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The shades of night were falling fast, As through an Alpine village passed A youth, who bore, 'mid snow and ice, A banner with the strange device, Excelsior!

His brow was sad; his eye beneath, Flashed like a falchion from its sheath, And like a silver clarion rung The accents of that unknown tongue, Excelsior!

In happy homes he saw the light Of household fires gleam warm and bright; Above, the spectral glaciers shone, And from his lips escaped a groan, Excelsior!

"Try not the Pass!" the old man said:
"Dark lowers the tempest overhead,
The roaring torrent is deep and wide!
And loud that clarion voice replied,
Excelsior!

"Oh stay," the maiden said, "and rest Thy weary head upon this breast!" A tear stood in his bright blue eye, But still he answered, with a sigh, Excelsior!

"Beware the pine-tree's withered branch! Beware the awful avalanche!" This was the peasant's last Good-night, A voice replied, far up the height, Excelsior!

At break of day, as heavenward
The pious monks of Saint Bernard
Uttered the oft-repeated prayer,
A voice cried through the startled air,
Excelsior!

A traveler, by the faithful hound, Half-buried in the snow was found, Still grasping in his hand of ice That banner with the strange device, Excelsior! There in the twilight cold and gray, Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay, And from the sky, serene and far, A voice fell, like a falling star, Excelsior!

Appendix F

One-Act Play Oral Review Assignment Sheet

You must complete one assignment sheet for each work that you read. You will only be required to speak about one of the plays if you read more than one. Answer each of the following questions and give a brief (one to two minutes) "play talk" of the play at the end of class. Turn in each sheet.

- 1. Which play did you read?
- 2. What was the conflict? How was it resolved?
- 3. List the characters. Describe the way each one was characterized.
- 4. What was the setting and how was setting used in the play?
- 5. Did you notice any other interesting use of the genre traits list?
- 6. Prepare a short "play talk" about the play. Tell your classmates what it is about. Mention the ways that the items from our list of characteristics are used in the play. Address any interesting information about the play. Tell your classmates why you do or do not recommend reading it.

Appendix G

One-Act Play Assignment

You will be creating an original one-act play. Your play may be about anything you want.

Guidelines:

- Aim for a running time of 10-15 minutes (10-15 pages, assuming one minute per page. 12-point font).
 - Pay attention to the "Characteristics of a One-Act Play." Follow the conventions of form. Make sure to adhere to those that are requirements for the genre!
- Experimentation is acceptable with regards "sometimes" characteristics.
- Make sure that your work is school-appropriate
- The first draft is due for peer-review in 4 days

Getting Started

Before you begin your writing, address the following:

What will your play be about?

What is the setting?

Who are the main characters? (Please, feel free to "build" another character like we did in the exercise, and answer all of the characterization questions).

What is the conflict?

How will the conflict be resolved?

Grading

Good work will meet the following standards:

- The play is 10-15 minutes in length (About 10-15 pages of 12-point font)
- Plot is developed, conflict is introduced early, and there is some sort of resolution
- Setting it makes sense that the play takes place in this setting. The character(s) should interact with the setting in some way. Setting may establish a mood.
- There are a minimal number of well-developed characters
- Dialogue is interesting believable
- The written conventions of the genre are followed (the presentation of title, cast of characters, and setting, presentation of dialogue, use of ellipses, inclusion of stage directions, etc.)
- Stage directions and stage business are put to use

Bonus Points: Writer makes use of the "sometimes" genre traits

Appendix H Grading Rubric

	Length	Plot, conflict, and resolution	Characters
_	Significantly less than 10 minutes (Plays out in 4 minutes or less)	There is no conflict, plot is undeveloped, nothing is resolved	Characters are not believable and not developed
2	The play does not meet the 10 minutes requirement (Plays out in about 7 minutes or less)	Conflict is introduced late in the play. Plot is poorly developed. Resolution is arbitrary.	Characters are somewhat believable and poorly developed
ယ	The play is slightly less than 10 minutes	Conflict is introduced late in the play. Plot may be shallow. Resolution loosely ties things together	Characters are somewhat believable and somewhat developed
4	The play meets the time requirement of 10-15 minutes	Conflict is introduced early. There may be unnecessary exposition. Plot is developed. Resolution ties everything together.	Characters are believable and somewhat developed
⊘ i	The play meets the time requirement of 10-15 minutes, being closer to 15 minutes	Conflict is introduced promptly. Plot is well-developed. Resolution makes sense and ties everything together.	Characters are believable and well-developed
6	The play fulfills or exceeds the time requirement 10-15 minutes or more)	Conflict is introduced early or immediately. Plot is well-developed and resolution is clever.	Characters are life-like and well-developed

Dialogue	Stage Directions and stage business	Setting
Q	0	Q
Dialogue is not believable. Dialect is not used.	Stage directions and stage business are not used.	There is no setting.
Dialogue is believable at times	Stage directions and stage business are used to show action sparsely	The setting is unclear, is not related to the plot, and characters do not interact with the setting
Dialogue is awkward, but believable at times.	Stage directions and stage business are used to show action occasionally	The setting is not crucial to the plot. The purpose of the setting is unclear. Characters do not interact with the setting
Dialogue is believable	Stage directions and stage business are used to show action consistently	The setting is crucial to the plot. The setting has a purpose and establishes a mood. The characters do not interact with the setting
Dialogue is believable and well-developed.	Stage directions and stage business are used to show action frequently	The setting is crucial to the plot. The setting has a purpose and establishes a mood. The characters interact with the setting.
Dialogue is believable and compelling.	Stage directions and stage business are frequently used to show action in an interesting manner	The setting is developed and is crucial to the plot. The setting has a purpose and establishes a mood. The characters interact with the setting.

Written Conventions

The writers display no knowledge of the characteristics of one-act plays, formal conventions are abandoned.

Some of the written conventions such as presentation of title, cast of characters, summary of setting, proper presentation of dialogue, inclusion of dialogue, etc., are included. They are presented improperly. Most of these elements are lacking.

Some of the written conventions such as presentation of title, cast of characters, summary of setting, proper presentation of dialogue, inclusion of dialogue, etc., are included and are presented properly. Some of these elements are lacking

M of the written conventions such as presentation of title, cast of characters, summary of setting, proper presentation of dialogue, inclusion of dialogue, etc., are included and presented properly. Some may be presented improperly or lacking completely.

All of the written conventions such as presentation of title, cast of characters, summary of setting, proper presentation of dialogue, inclusion of dialogue, etc., are included. Most are presented properly. None are lacking.

All of the written conventions such as presentation of title, cast of characters, summary of setting, proper presentation of dialogue, inclusion of dialogue, etc., are included and presented properly.

Appendix I

Mini-lesson # 1 Writing Dialogue

Your goal as a playwright is to create dialogue that expresses the action and conflict of the play, encapsulates the essence of your characters, and communicates the tone of the play. Through this dialogue, the audience will also be made aware of the play's theme. How, then, can you create effective dialogue that "shows," rather than "tells" the audience what is happening?

Share with students:

Guidelines for creating dialogue

- 1. Use dialogue to communicate the basic details. Remember, one-act plays are brief. Only include information that is crucial to the progress of the plot.
- 2. Use dialogue to communicate names and facts. This will make up for the lack of an exposition.
- 3. Speak explicitly. Do not be vague. The audience is more likely to remember specific details over generalizations.

 Example: "Ouch! Don't touch that! That's the bruise from where Little Billy clobbered my shin with a wooden baseball bat." vs. "Ouch! Don't touch that! That's where he hit me with a bat"

Exercise: Using the dramatic ellipsis

In dramatic dialogue, an ellipsis represents a character's unfinished words or thoughts. This technique is useful when your character is lost for words or deep in thought.

Practice: write this statement on the board:

"No, I do not want to go to the store. Wait. I do want to go to the store. I would love to go to the store."

Have students rewrite this statement in the voice of a character who was roused from a long nap by an individual asking "do you want to go to the store?" Make use of the dramatic ellipsis to demonstrate the character's sleepiness.

Exercise: Diction

How does your character speak? Is she a southern belle? Is he a cab driver in the Bronx? Is he high-class royalty? Different people speak with different diction and in various dialects. Consider the gender, class, education, and location of your characters when writing in diction.

Practice: alter the following statements to fit the character

Example: "I will come downstairs when I find my pants."

Aging Harvard graduate: "I will join you downstairs and soon as I locate my trousers."

1.	"I've dated weirder guys than you."
	British socialite:
2.	"I absolutely adore that movie!"
	High-school football player:
3.	"I do not want to go to school today, school is terribly boring."
	Kindergarten student

Exercise: Paying Attention to Speech

Students have been asked to record examples of dialogue in their writer's notebooks. Through their everyday activity in various public places, students should have several pages of snippets of dialogue.

Assignment: Choose one of the snippets that you find most interesting. State the statement, the setting in which it was spoken, and describe the speaker. Can you recall expressions, movements, or body language?

Create a scene (one page max) using this snippet. This dialogue should occur somewhere within the scene. Use stage directions to describe the actions and movements of the speaker. Include at least one other character. Through dialogue, develop the speaker as a character.

Play Title Reviewer's Name			
	What is the play about? Describe the plot.		
2.	How many characters are there? Are they interesting and believable? Are they well-developed? Suggest ways for improving characterization.		
3.	What is the setting? Is it crucial to the plot? If yes, how so? Do the characters interact with their setting? Does it establish a mood?		
4.	What is the conflict? Is it introduced early in the play? How is it resolved?		
5.	How is dialogue used? Is it believable? Is it original or compelling? Suggest methods of improving dialogue.		
6.	Are stage directions and stage business used? Are they effective? Do they allow you as the reader to experience an action that does unstated? Can you suggest place where stage directions should be added?		
7.	Does the play follow the conventions of form and the characteristics of one-act plays? Where does the play deviate?		

8. Do you have any other suggestions for the writers?

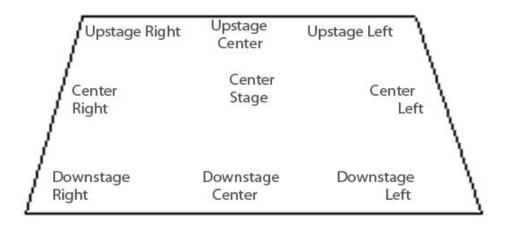
Appendix K

Mini-lesson # 2 – Stage Directions and Stage Business Handout

Stage Directions: the movement and location of actors on a stage.

The stage is broken down into **Upstage** (back), **Center Stage**, and **Downstage** (front). This is because historically, stages were higher in the back than in the front to allow the audience to see all parts of the stage without tiered seating.

Actors may be asked to move **Stage Left** or **Stage Right**. These directions are from the point of view of the actors. If a director yelled Downstage Left, the audience would see the actor come to the front right portion of the stage.



AUDIENCE

Stage business: a series of small detailed actions that an actor does in one spot to develop the character physically.

Stage Business includes:

- Actions
- Mannerisms
- Habits
- Quirks
- Facial Expressions

The stage business is included by the playwright in the script. It can be found italicized and in parentheses next to the name of the character who is doing the action, often after or during dialogue.

Read the Following excerpt and answer the questions.

JERRY: (most faintly, now; he is very near death). You won't be coming back here anymore, Peter; you've been dispossessed. You've lost your bench, but you've defended your honor. And Peter, I'll tell you something now; you're not really a vegetable; it's all right, you're an animal. You're an animal too. But you'd better hurry now, Peter. Hurry, you'd better go... see? (JERRY takes a handkerchief and with great effort and pain wipes the knife handle clean of fingerprints). Hurry away, Peter. (PETER begins to stagger away). Wait... wait, Peter. Take your book... book. Right here... beside me... on your bench... my bench, rather. Come... take your book. (PETER starts for the book, but retreats). Hurry... Peter. (PETER rushes to the bench, grabs the book, retreats). Very good, Peter... very good. Now... hurry away. (PETER hesitates for a moment, then flees, stage left). Hurry away, your parakeets are making the dinner... the cats... are setting the table...

Edward Albee, "The Zoo Story"

- 1. What is the format for including stage directions or stage business within a play?
- 2. How many examples of stage business are in this excerpt? Give one example.
- 3. Which of the italicized sections above is an example of stage directions? What would you see as an audience member at this point?
- 4. What does the stage business enable the audience to see that they wouldn't see with dialogue alone?

Activity: Choose an excerpt from the play you are writing. The excerpt that you choose should be 2-4 minutes in length. With your group members, add action to your scene by including stage business. Address where your character(s) will move about the stage using stage directions. If a character exits the stage, address where the exit will occur using stage directions. Also consider **Blocking**: where all of the characters will be located on the stage so they are most visible to the audience. Be prepared to perform at the end of class (it is ok to use a script)!

Appendix L Reflection

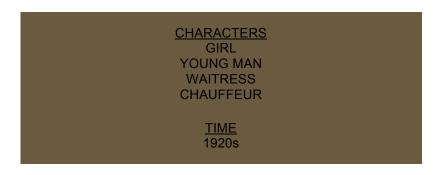
Please respond to the following questions as fully as possible. This reflection will help you to assess your own work and growth within this unit and also help me to improve upon this unit in the future.

- 1. Did you enjoy the genre study on one-act plays?
- 2. What parts of the genre study did you find to be most helpful?
- 3. Do you feel you have a mastery of knowledge about one-act plays?
- 4. Did you use your writing journal regularly? Did you find it useful for writing your play?
- 5. How did working in a group benefit your understanding of the genre? How did your group work together?
- 6. Are you satisfied with the play you produced? Why or why not?
- 7. Are you happy with the way the plays were published/performed? What should have been done differently?
- 8. What suggestions do you have for improving the one-act play genre study?
- 9. Do you see yourself writing another play in the future?

WHILE THE AUTO WAITS

by O. Henry

adapted for the stage by Walter Wykes



[Twilight. The quiet corner of a city park. A GIRL in gray sits alone on a bench, reading her book. A large-meshed veil hangs over her face, which nevertheless shines through with a calm and unconscious beauty. When she turns a page, the book slips from her hand, and a YOUNG MAN, who has been hovering nearby, pounces upon it. He returns it to her with a gallant and hopeful air.]

GIRL: Oh, thank you.

YOUNG MAN: Nice weather we're having.

GIRL: Yes.

[Pause.]

YOUNG MAN: Well ...

GIRL: You may sit down, if you like.

YOUNG MAN: [Eagerly.] Are you sure? I don't want to interrupt your reading.

GIRL: Really, sit. I would like very much to have you do so. The light is too bad for reading. I would prefer to talk.

YOUNG MAN: Well, if you insist. [He slides hopefully onto the seat next to her.] You know, you've got to be the stunningest girl I've ever seen. Honest. I had my eye on you since yesterday.

GIRL: Yesterday?

YOUNG MAN: Didn't know somebody was bowled over by those pretty lamps of yours, did you, honeysuckle?

GIRL: Whoever you are, you must remember that I am a lady. I will excuse the remark you have just made because the mistake was, doubtless, not an unnatural one—in your circle. I asked you to sit down; if the invitation must constitute me your honeysuckle, consider it withdrawn.

YOUNG MAN: Sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. I just thought ... well, I mean, there are girls in parks, you know—that is, of course, you don't know, but—

GIRL: Abandon the subject, if you please. Of course I know.

YOUNG MAN: Right.

GIRL: Now, tell me about these people passing and crowding, each way, along these paths. Where are they going? Why do they hurry so? Are they happy?

YOUNG MAN: It is interesting to watch them—isn't it? The wonderful drama of life. Some are going to supper and some to—er—other places. One can't help but wonder what their histories are.

GIRL: Yes! How fascinating they seem to me—rushing about with their petty little dreams and their common worries! I come here to sit because here, only, can I be near the great, common, throbbing heart of humanity. My part in life is cast where its beating is never felt. Can you surmise why I spoke to you, Mr.—?

YOUNG MAN: Parkenstacker. And your name...?

[He waits, eager and hopeful, but she only holds up a slender finger and smiles slightly.]

GIRL: No, you would recognize it immediately. It is simply impossible to keep one's name out of the papers. Or even one's portrait. This veil and this hat—my maid's, of course—are my only protection. They furnish me with an incog. You should have seen the chauffeur staring when he thought I did not see. Candidly, there are five or six names that belong in the holy of holies, and mine, by the accident of birth, is one of them. I spoke to you, Mr. Stackenpot—

YOUNG MAN: Parkenstacker.

GIRL: —Mr. Parkenstacker, because I wanted to talk, for once, with a natural man—a real man—one unspoiled by the despicable gloss of wealth and supposed social superiority. Oh! You have no idea how weary I am of it—money, money, money! And of the men who surround me, dancing like little marionettes all cut from the same pattern. I am sick of pleasure, of jewels, of travel, of society, of luxuries of all kinds!

YOUNG MAN: I always had the idea that money must be a pretty good thing.

GIRL: A competence is to be desired, certainly. But when you have so many millions that—! [She concludes the sentence with a gesture of despair.] It is the monotony of it that palls. Drives, dinners, theatres, balls, suppers, balls, dinners, more balls, followed of course by dinners and suppers, with the gilding of superfluous wealth over it all. Sometimes the very tinkle of the ice in my champagne glass nearly drives me mad.

YOUNG MAN: You know ... I've always liked to read up on the habits and customs of the wealthy class. I consider myself a bit of a connoisseur on the subject. But I like to have my information accurate. Now, I had formed the opinion that champagne is cooled in the bottle and not by placing ice in the glass.

[The GIRL gives a musical laugh of genuine amusement.]

GIRL: You must understand that we of the non-useful class depend for our amusement upon departure from precedent. Just now it is a fad to put ice in champagne. The idea was originated by a visiting Prince of Tartary while dining at the Waldorf. It will soon give way to some other whim. Just as, at a dinner party this week on Madison Avenue, a green kid glove was laid by the plate of each guest to be put on and used while eating olives.

YOUNG MAN: [Humbly.] I see.

GIRL: These special diversions of the inner circle do not become familiar to the common public, of course.

YOUNG MAN: Of course. It's all quite fascinating. I've always wanted to participate in, or at least witness first hand, the rituals of the elite.

GIRL: We are drawn to that which we do not understand.

YOUNG MAN: I guess that's true.

GIRL: For my part, I have always thought that if I should ever love a man it would be one of lowly station. One who is a worker and not a drone. But, doubtless, the claims of caste and wealth will prove stronger than my inclination. Just now I am besieged by two suitors. One is Grand Duke of a German principality. I think he has, or has had, a wife, somewhere, driven mad by his intemperance and cruelty. The other is an English Marquis, so cold and mercenary that I prefer even the diabolical nature of the Duke. What is it that impels me to tell you these things, Mr. Packenwacker?

YOUNG MAN: Parkenstacker.

GIRL: Of course.

YOUNG MAN: I don't know why you should bare your soul to a common man like me, but you can't know how much I appreciate your confidences.

[The girl contemplates him with the calm, impersonal regard that befits the difference in their stations.]

GIRL: What is your line of business, if you don't mind my asking?

YOUNG MAN: A very humble one. But I hope to rise in the world someday.

GIRL: You have aspirations?

YOUNG MAN: Oh, yes. There's so much I want to do.

GIRL: I admire your enthusiasm. I, myself, can find very little to be enthused about, burdened, as I am, by the constant pleasures and diversions of my class.

YOUNG MAN: Did you really mean it, before, when you said you could love a man of lowly station?

GIRL: Indeed I did. But I said "might."

YOUNG MAN: Why only "might?"

GIRL: Well, there is the Grand Duke and the Marquis to think of, you know.

YOUNG MAN: But you've said yourself—they're so cold.

GIRL: I am sure you understand when I say there are certain expectations of a young lady in my position. It would be such a disappointment to certain members of my family if I were to marry a commoner as we like to call them. You simply cannot imagine the scandal it would cause. All the magazines would remark upon it. I might even be cut off from the family fortune. And yet ... no calling could be too humble were the man I loved all that I wish him to be.

YOUNG MAN: I work in a restaurant.

[The girl shrinks slightly.]

GIRL: Not as a waiter? Labor is noble, but personal attendance, you know—valets and—

YOUNG MAN: Not a waiter. I'm a cashier in ... in that restaurant over there.

GIRL: [With a strange, suspicious look.] That ... that one there? [He nods.] That one?

YOUNG MAN: Yes.

GIRL: [Confused.] Are you sure?

YOUNG MAN: Quite sure.

GIRL: But-

[Suddenly the GIRL consults a tiny watch set in a bracelet of rich design upon her wrist. She rises with a start.]

GIRL: Oh!

YOUNG MAN: What is it? What's wrong?

GIRL: I ... I am late for an important engagement.

YOUNG MAN: An engagement?

GIRL: Yes!

YOUNG MAN: Some sort of ball or-

GIRL: Yes, yes!

YOUNG MAN: Will I see you again?

GIRL: I do not know. Perhaps—but the whim may not seize me again. I must go quickly now. There is a dinner, and a box at the play—and, oh! The same old round! Perhaps you noticed an automobile at the upper corner of the park as you came. One with a white body.

YOUNG MAN: [Knitting his brow strangely.] And red running gear?

GIRL: Yes. I always come in that. Pierre waits for me there. He supposes me to be shopping in the department store across the square. Conceive of the bondage of the life wherein we must deceive even our chauffeurs. Good-night.

YOUNG MAN: Wait! It's getting dark, and the park is full of questionable characters. Can't I walk you to your—

GIRL: [Quickly.] No! I mean ... no. If you have the slightest regard for my wishes, you will remain on this bench for ten minutes after I have left. I do not mean to question your intentions, but you are probably aware that autos generally bear the monogram of their owner. Again, good-night.

[Suddenly a WAITRESS approaches, wearing a soiled, dirty uniform—evidently just coming off her shift.]

WAITRESS: Mary-Jane! Mary-Jane Parker! What on earth are you doing out here?! Don't you know what time it is?!

GIRL: [A little flustered.] To whom are you speaking, Madame?

WAITRESS: To whom am I ... to you! Who do you think, you ninny?!

GIRL: Then I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about.

WAITRESS: You're shift started fifteen minutes ago! Mr. Witherspoon's in a rage! This is the third time this month you've been late! You'd better get yourself over there and into uniform before he cuts you loose for good!

GIRL: I-

WAITRESS: Go on, now! I know you can't afford to miss a paycheck!

GIRL: [Attempting to maintain her dignity.] You must have me confused with—with someone else.

WAITRESS: Confused with—why, Mary-Jane Parker, we've known each other for three years! We swap shifts! Have you been drinking?! Why are you wearing that ridiculous hat?!

GIRL: [To the YOUNG MAN.] I ... I'm sorry, Mr. Porkenblogger-

YOUNG MAN: Parkenstacker.

GIRL: Parkenstacker.

WAITRESS: Parkenstacker?

YOUNG MAN: Yes, Parkenstacker.

WAITRESS: As in THE Parkenstackers?! From the society pages?!

GIRL: The society pages?

YOUNG MAN: If only I were so fortunate.

GIRL: You ... you must excuse me. My chauffeur is waiting.

WAITRESS: Chauffeur?! What kind of crazy airs are you putting on?! You've never had a chauffeur in your life! You don't even own an automobile!

GIRL: I do so!

WAITRESS: Since when?!

GIRL: Since ... Oh, get away from me! I don't know you!

WAITRESS: Don't know me?! You have been drinking! I'm going to tell your mother!

[The GIRL rushes off, followed closely by the WAITRESS. The YOUNG MAN picks up her book where she has dropped it.]

YOUNG MAN: Wait! You forgot your-

[But they are gone. After a few moments, a CHAUFFEUR approaches cautiously.]

CHAUFFEUR: Begging your pardon, sir.

YOUNG MAN: Yes, Henri?

CHAUFFEUR: I don't mean to intrude, but your dinner reservation—shall I cancel or—

YOUNG MAN: No ... I'm coming.

CHAUFFEUR: Very good, sir. The auto is waiting.

[The CHAUFFEUR exits and leaves the YOUNG MAN standing alone for a moment as the lights fade.]

Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*

with anchors for the primary symbols and images Cindy Pollaro

SCENE. The kitchen in the now abandoned farmhouse of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order--unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table--other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the Sheriff comes in followed by the County Attorney and Hale. The Sheriff and Hale are in middle life, the County Attorney is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women--the Sheriff's wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. Mrs. Hale is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [Rubbing his hands.] This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

MRS. PETERS [After taking a step forward.] I'm not--cold.

SHERIFF [*Unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business*.] Now, Mr. Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr. Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF [Looking about.] It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us--no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove--and you know Frank.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

SHERIFF Oh--yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy--I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today and as long as I went over everything here myself--

COUNTY ATTORNEY Well, Mr. Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

HALE Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, "I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone." I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet--I guess you know about how much he talked himself, but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John--

COUNTY ATTORNEY Let's talk about that later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

HALE I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, "Come in." I wasn't sure, I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door--this door [indicating the door by which the two women are still standing] and there in that rocker--[pointing to it] sat Mrs. Wright.

[They all look at the rocker.

COUNTY ATTORNEY What--was she doing?

HALE She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of--pleating it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY And how did she--look?

HALE Well, she looked queer.

COUNTY ATTORNEY How do you mean--queer?

HALE Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE Why, I don't think she minded--one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, "How do, Mrs. Wright, it's cold, ain't it?" And she said, "Is it?"--and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, "I want to see John." And then she--laughed, I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: "Can't I see John?" "No," she says, kind o' dull like. "Ain't he home?" says I. "Yes," says she, "he's home." "Then why can't I see him?" I asked her, out of patience. "Cause he's dead," says she. "Dead?" says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. "Why--where is he?" says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs--like that [himself pointing to the room above]. I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here--then I says, "Why, what did he die of?" "He died of a rope round his neck," says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might--need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin'--

COUNTY ATTORNEY I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked . . . [Stops, his face twitches] . . . but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, "No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything." So we went back downstairs. She was still sitting that same way. "Has anybody been notified?" I asked. "No," says she, unconcerned. "Who did this, Mrs. Wright?" said Harry. He said it business-like--and she stopped pleatin' of her apron. "I don't know," she says. "You don't know?" says Harry. "No," says she. "Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?" says Harry. "Yes," says she, "but I was on the inside." "Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn't wake up?" says Harry. "I didn't wake up," she said after him. We must 'a looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, "I sleep sound." Harry was going to ask her more questions but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers' place, where there's a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY And what did Mrs. Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

HALE She moved from that chair to this one over here [Pointing to a small chair in the corner] and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at mescared. [The County Attorney, who has had his note book out, makes a note.] I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr. Lloyd came, and you, Mr. Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [Looking around.] I guess we'll go upstairs first--and then out to the barn and around there. [To the Sheriff.] You're convinced that there was nothing important here--nothing that would point to any motive.

SHERIFF Nothing here but kitchen things.

[The County Attorney, after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Here's a nice mess.

[The women draw nearer.

PETERS [To the other woman.] Oh, her fruit; it did freeze. [To the Lawyer.] She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

[The two women move a little closer together.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [With the gallantry of a young politician.] And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? [The women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place.] Dirty towels! [Kicks his foot against the pans under the sink.] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS. HALE [Stiffly.] There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY To be sure. And yet [With a little bow to her] I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels.

[He gives it a pull to expose its full length again.

MRS. HALE Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

MRS. HALE [Shaking her head.] I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house--it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS. HALE I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson. And then-

COUNTY ATTORNEY Yes--?

MRS. HALE [Looking about.] It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY No--it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

MRS. HALE Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS. HALE No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now.

[He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door.

SHERIFF I Suppose anything Mrs. Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs. Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS. PETERS Yes, Mr. Henderson.

[The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen.

MRS. HALE I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticising.

[She arranges the pans under sink which the Lawyer had shoved out of place.

MRS. PETERS Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS. HALE Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. [Gives the roller towel a pull.] Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS. PETERS [Who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan.] She had bread set.

[Stands still.

MRS. HALE [Eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the breadbox, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it.] She was going to put this in there. [Picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things.] It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. [Gets up on the chair and looks.] I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs. Peters. Yes--here; [Holding it toward the window] this is cherries, too. [Looking again.] I declare I believe that's the only one. [Gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside.] She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

[She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth.

MRS. PETERS Well, I must get those things from the front room closet. [She goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back.] You coming with me, Mrs. Hale? You could help me carry them.

[They go in the other room; reappear, Mrs. Peters carrying a dress and skirt, Mrs. Hale following with a pair of shoes.

MRS. PETERS My, it's cold in there.

[She puts the clothes on the big table, and hurries to the stove.

MRS. HALE [Examining the skirt.] Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that--oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

MRS. PETERS She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. [Opens stair door and looks.] Yes, here it is.

[Quickly shuts door leading upstairs.

MRS. HALE [Abruptly moving toward her.] Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE Do you think she did it?

MRS. PETERS [In a frightened voice.] Oh, I don't know.

MRS. HALE Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS. PETERS [Starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice.] Mr. Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr. Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS. HALE Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS. PETERS No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a--funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS. HALE That's just what Mr. Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS. PETERS Mr. Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or--sudden feeling.

MRS. HALE [Who is standing by the table.] Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here. [She puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy.] It's wiped to here. [Makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the breadbox. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.] Wonder how they are finding things upstairs. I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of sneaking. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS. PETERS But Mrs. Hale, the law is the law.

MRS. HALE I s'pose 'tis. [Unbuttoning her coat.] Better loosen up your things, Mrs. Peters. You won't feel them when you go out.

[Mrs. Peters takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.

MRS. PETERS She was piecing a quilt.

[She brings the large serving basket and they look at the bright pieces.

MRS. HALE It's log-cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?

[Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The Sheriff enters followed by Hale and the County Attorney.

SHERIFF They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it!

[The men laugh, the women look abashed.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [Rubbing his hands over the stove.] Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up.

[The men go outside.

MRS. HALE [Resentfully.] I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. [She sits down at the big table smoothing out a block with decision.] I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

MRS. PETERS [Apologetically.] Of course they've got awful important things on their minds.

[Pulls up a chair and joins Mrs. Hale at the table.

MRS. HALE [Examining another block.] Mrs. Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!

[After she had said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant Mrs. Hale has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.

MRS. PETERS Oh, what are you doing, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE [Mildly.] Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. [Threading a needle.] Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS. PETERS [Nervously.] I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS. HALE I'll just finish up this end. [Suddenly stopping and leaning forward.] Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS. PETERS Oh--I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. [Mrs. Hale starts to say something, looks at Mrs. Peters, then goes on sewing.] Well I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think. [Putting apron and other things together.] I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS. HALE In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS. PETERS [Looking in cupboard.] Why, here's a bird-cage. [Holds it up.] Did she have a bird, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE Why, I don't know whether she did or not--I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS. PETERS [Glancing around.] Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it.

MRS. HALE I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS. PETERS No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats--being afraid of them. My cat got in her room and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS. HALE My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS. PETERS [Examining the cage.] Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS. HALE [Looking too.] Looks as if someone must have been rough with it.

MRS. PETERS Why, yes.

[She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table.

MRS. HALE I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS. PETERS But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

MRS. HALE It would, wouldn't it? [Dropping her sewing.] But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when she was here. I-- [Looking around the room]--wish I had.

MRS. PETERS But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale--your house and your children.

MRS. HALE I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful--and that's why I ought to have come. I--I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was, I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now--

[Shakes her head.

MRS. PETERS Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs. Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until--something comes up.

MRS. HALE Not having children makes less work--but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS No; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS. HALE Yes--good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him--[Shivers.] Like a raw wind that gets to the bone. [Pauses, her eye falling on the cage.] I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

MRS. PETERS I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

[She reaches over and swings the broken door, swings it again, both women watch it.

MRS. HALE You weren't raised round here, were you? [Mrs. Peters shakes her head.] You didn't know--her?

MRS. PETERS Not till they brought her yesterday.

MRS. HALE She--come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself--real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and-fluttery. How--she--did--change. [Silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to every day things.] Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS. PETERS Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs. Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here--and her things.

[They look in the sewing basket.

MRS. HALE Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it. [Brings out a fancy box.] What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. [Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose.] Why-- [Mrs. Peters bends nearer, then turns her face away.] There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS. PETERS Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS. HALE [Lifting the silk.] Oh, Mrs. Peters--its--

[Mrs. Peters bends closer.

MRS. PETERS It's the bird.

MRS. HALE [Jumping up.] But, Mrs. Peters--look at it! Its neck! Look at its neck! It's all--to the other side.

MRS. PETERS Somebody--wrung--its--neck.

[Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror. Steps are heard outside. Mrs. Hale slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter Sheriff and County Attorney. Mrs. Peters rises.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [As one turning from serious things to little pleasantries.] Well, ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS. PETERS We think she was going to--knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. [Seeing the birdcage.] Has the bird flown?

MRS. HALE [Putting more quilt pieces over the box.] We think the--cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [Preoccupied.] Is there a cat?

[Mrs. Hale glances in a quick covert way at Mrs. Peters.

MRS. PETERS Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [To Sheriff Peters, continuing an interrupted conversation.] No sign at all of anyone having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. [They start upstairs.] It would have to have been someone who knew just the--

[Mrs. Peters sits down. The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they can not help saying it.

MRS. HALE She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS. PETERS [In a whisper] When I was a girl--my kitten--there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes--and before I could get there--[Covers her face an instant.] If they hadn't held me back I would have--[Catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly]--hurt him.

MRS. HALE [With a slow look around her.] I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. [Pause.] No, Wright wouldn't like the bird--a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

MRS. PETERS [Moving uneasily.] We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS. HALE I knew John Wright.

MRS. PETERS It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs. Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS. HALE His neck. Choked the life out of him.

[Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.

MRS. PETERS [With rising voice.] We don't know who killed him. We don't know.

MRS. HALE [Her own feeling not interrupted.] If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful--still, after the bird was still.

MRS. PETERS [Something within her speaking.] I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died--after he was two years old, and me with no other then--

MRS. HALE [Moving.] How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?

MRS. PETERS I know what stillness is. [Pulling herself back.] The law has got to punish crime, Mrs. Hale.

MRS. HALE [Not as if answering that.] I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. [A look around the room.] Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

MRS. PETERS [Looking upstairs.] We mustn't--take on.

MRS. HALE I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be--for women, I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things--it's all just a different kind of the same thing. [Brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it.] If I was you I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it ain't. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She--she may never know whether it was broke or not.

MRS. PETERS [Takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice.] My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a--dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with--with--wouldn't they laugh!

[The men are heard coming down stairs.

MRS. HALE [Under her breath.] Maybe they would--maybe they wouldn't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show--something to make a story about--a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it--

[The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter Hale from outer door.

HALE Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY I'm going stay here a while by myself. [*To the Sheriff*.] You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF Do you want to see what Mrs. Peters is going to take in?

[The Lawyer goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. [Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back.] No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS Not--just that way.

SHERIFF [Chuckling.] Married to the law. [Moves toward the other room.] I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [Scoffingly.] Oh, windows!

SHERIFF We'll be right out, Mr. Hale.

[Hale goes outside. The Sheriff follows the County Attorney into the other room. Then Mrs. Hale rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at Mrs. Peters, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting Mrs. Hale's. A moment Mrs. Hale holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly Mrs. Peters throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter County Attorney and Sheriff.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [Facetiously.] Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to--what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS. HALE [Her hand against her pocket.] We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson.

(CURTAIN)

1917

Appendix N Supplementary resources for further reading

- Bomer, Randy. *Time For Meaning: Crafting Literate Lives in Middle and High School*.

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- Calkins, Lucy McCormick. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton -Cook, 1998.
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- Hatcher, Jeffrey. The Art and Craft of Playwriting. Cincinnati: Story Press, 1996.
- Smith, Michael W. and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm. *Going with the Flow*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. 2006.

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