

VERMONT  
**YOUNG**  
PLAYWRITERS

**PLAY STARTERS**

Brainstorming is a fertile activity for finding inspiration. Use the categories below as prompts for percolating possible entry points for starting your play. Select a couple prompts from every category or do them all! Set a timer, suspend judgment, and jot down ideas as they come to you.

**SETTING – where & when?**

- What can be or must be accomplished in 10 minutes?
  - Ticking Bombs or Before the Ice Cream Melts – time constraints that create a sense of urgency
- Moments When a Decision Must Be Made
- WHEREs – funny and not so funny
- WHENs – funny and not so funny

**ACTIVITIES – doing what?**

- Meaningful Activities People Do Alone & Together
  - This prompt will help you consider a context that will literally set a play in motion by giving the characters something to do.
  - Activities provide character business, avoid the stagnation of “talking heads” and create secondary means through which characters can pursue their wants, communicate and react.
  - Activities may function both as concrete AND symbolic storytelling devices.

**CHARACTERS – who?**

- Famous Protagonist/Antagonist Pairs with conflicting wants
- Original Protagonist/Antagonist Pairs
- Fascinating Characters
- Big and Small Human Desires

**CONFLICT – what?**

- Experiences/Things People Want But Can't Easily Get
- Life Changing Events, Incidents and Moments (Pre-school, middle, high, 20s, 30s-50s, 60s-80s)
- Do or Die Situations
- True but Unusual Situations
- Fantasy Situations
- Comic Situations
- Change Agents

**SO WHAT – why this play?**

- What's Funny About Being Human
- Burning Questions
- Ways I Wish People Would Change
- Surprising Ways People Change (Decisions, Open, Close, Forgive, Awaken, Win, Lose...)
- Messages and Life Lessons
- Morals, Proverbs, Sayings, Saws, Mottos and Maxims
- Epiphanies and AH HAs!

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**PLAY STARTER WORKSHEET FOR A 10-MINUTE PLAY**

Use this worksheet to develop the foundation of your play. Answer as many prompts as you can or want. Answers can be one sentence. This isn't the only way to start a play! It can really help by uncovering facets for your play to put it on solid ground.

**PLAY TITLE**

**PROTAGONIST**

**Character:** Name and describe the protagonist in one short sentence.  
Develop a short **backstory** how this character landed here, in this play, in this moment. What were they doing *just before*?

**Objective:** What does this character *want* badly? Make this a positive, specific, selfish, and pursuable goal.

**Motivation:** Why does the character want to win this objective and now? **What's at stake** if not achieved?

**Obstacle(s):** What's getting in the way of the character easily achieving the objective?

**Tactics:** Brainstorm a list of approaches this character might take to overcome obstacles and achieve the objective.  
(Brainstorm at least 3 tactics.)

**ANTAGONIST**

**Character:** Name and describe the protagonist in one short sentence.  
Develop a short **backstory** how this character landed here, in this play, in this moment.

**Objective:** What does this character *want* badly? Make this a positive, specific, selfish, and pursuable goal.

**Motivation:** Why does the character want to win this objective and now? **What's at stake** if not achieved?

**Obstacle(s):** What's getting in the way of the character easily achieving the objective?

**Tactics:** Brainstorm a list of approaches this character might take to overcome obstacles and achieve the objective.  
(Brainstorm at least 3 tactics.)

**ADDITIONAL CHARACTERS**

Define the character, objective, motivation, obstacle, and tactics of each, just as above.

**SETTING**

Specifically where & when? Is there a time constraint or "ticking bomb"?

**ACTIVITY**

To avoid creating a play of "talking heads" what is one or more of your characters *doing*?

**FIRST LINE**

Who says what?

**WHO CHANGES HOW? and SO WHAT?**

Who changes and how? What is the point of this play? the purpose? the message? the meaning? the lesson? the moral?