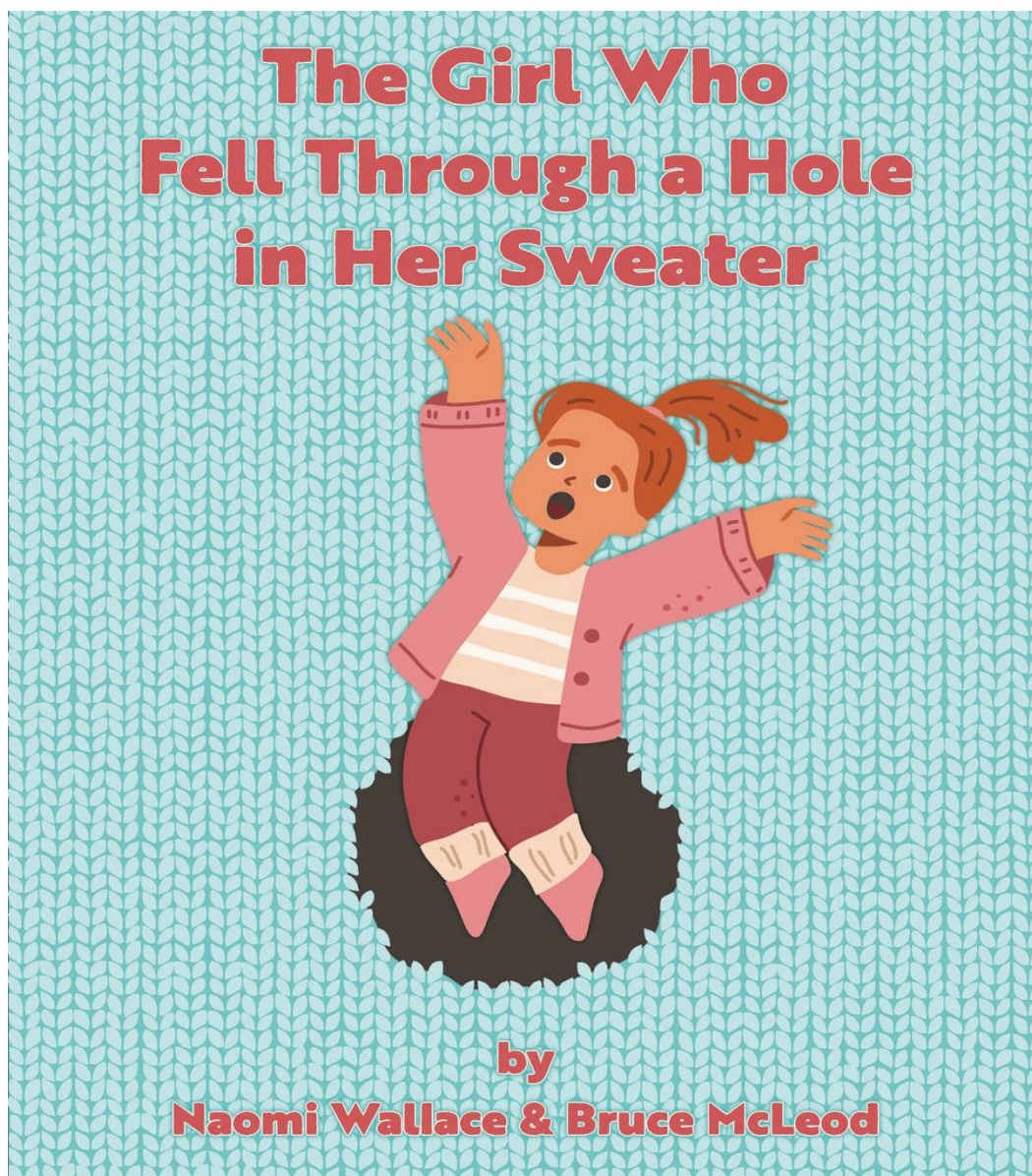




Teacher Resource Guide

For the UWGB Theatre & Dance Production

Written and Compiled
by Dr. Thomas Campbell

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Play Overview

Written in 2003 and published by Broadway Play Publishing in 2005, this is a play for young audiences by Naomi Wallace and Bruce McLeod.

The story follows a young girl named **Noil**, smart and capable, who has fallen through a hole in her sweater. For Noil to return home she must triumph over 3 ½ magical tasks. With the help of a singing narrator and a talking roach, Noil traverses the odd rules and strange characters of the world that exists in the hole inside her sweater.

This is an adventure play using the classic **Hero's Journey structure** along with themes of overcoming adversity, trust, teamwork, forgiveness, and staying true to yourself. Using a journey/quest structure, the play's narrator helps guide Noil (and the audience) along the story by **breaking the fourth wall** and highlighting the action through **meta-theatrical tactics**.

About the Authors

Naomi Wallace

Naomi Wallace, the daughter and granddaughter of Louisville journalists, knew early that writing was the best way for her to express herself and her values. But she thought it would be through poetry.

After Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, Wallace went for graduate work at the University of Iowa with the idea of becoming a poet. “I had always told myself that I didn’t like working with other people, that I wanted to work alone,” she said in an interview.

“And it was so wonderful to discover that I was wrong about myself,” she said. “I may have wanted that, but what I needed was collaboration. I’ve become a better writer through collaboration. And theater is one of the most collaborative arts.”



Wallace, 64, has become one of the most acclaimed playwrights of her generation, the author of more than two dozen plays and a long list of projects on her horizon. Those include finishing a trilogy of plays set in Kentucky and writing the book for two Broadway musicals: *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, the Loretta Lynn story (co-written with Greg Pierce); and *Small Town*, based on John Mellencamp’s work, especially his 1982 hit “Jack & Diane”.

Wallace’ many awards include a MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant in 1999, an Obie Award (Off-Broadway Theatre), the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Fellowship of Southern Writers Drama Award, the Horton Foote Award, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature and the inaugural Windham Campbell prize for drama.

Her most famous play is *One Flea Spare*, about a wealthy couple and two intruders quarantined together in 17th century London during the bubonic plague. The play, which explores the clash of social, cultural and sexual boundaries, was made part of the permanent repertoire of Comédie-Française, the French National Theatre. She is only the second American so honored by the 300-year-old theatre company, the other being Tennessee Williams. *One Flea Spare* had its American premiere at the Humana Festival of New Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville in 1996.

Wallace’s other well-known plays include *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Slaughter City* and *In the Heart of America*. In 1995, she published a book of poetry: *To Dance A Stony Field* (Peterloo Poets).

Wallace was born in Louisville and grew up with five siblings on a farm near Prospect, as well as in Amsterdam, the hometown of their Dutch mother, Sonja de Vries. Her father, journalist Henry Wallace, later became a civil rights activist. Her grandfather, Tom Wallace, spent most of his career in top editing jobs at The Courier-Journal and the Louisville Times. An ardent conservationist, he led a five-year effort in the 1920s to prevent construction of a hydroelectric dam that would have destroyed Cumberland Falls; then he helped preserve it a state park.

For more than 20 years, Naomi Wallace has lived in North Yorkshire, England, with her British partner, Bruce McLeod, and their three children. Until the COVID pandemic, the family spent every summer at Moncada, the 660-acre Wallace family farm near Prospect, most which is under conservation easements and can never be developed. Wallace says she doesn't get to the farm as often now that her daughters are grown, but "it's always an anchor, a place of creativity for me. It lives inside me."

After the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame ceremony on March 10, Wallace heads to New York for the opening of *The Return of Benjamin Lay* at the Sheen Center in Greenwich Village. She co-wrote the play with Marcus Rediker, an Owensboro-born historian. It is based on his 2017 book, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf who became the first Revolutionary Abolitionist*. The one-person show premiered last year in London with the same actor, Mark Provinelli.

Wallace said she loves collaborative writing. She co-wrote *The Girl Who Fell Through a Hole in Her Sweater* with her husband, and *Returning to Haifa*, an adaptation of Ghassan Kanafani's 1969 novella, with Palestinian playwright Ismail Khalidi. She and Khalidi collaborated again on *Guernica, Gaza: Visions from the Center of the Earth*, which was produced last fall in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Wallace's work can be controversial. After commissioning *Returning to Haifa*, the Public Theatre in New York refused to perform it. But censorship often happens quietly in theater, she said, when companies simply decide not to produce a play. "While my work has been highly awarded, I'm not a highly produced playwright," she said.

"For me, it's not just about art," Wallace said of her writing. "It's about art as a part of envisioning a better world, a more just world. Artists have at times been on the front line of what they call speaking truth to power. Artists have also been the shock troops for colonialism and war. So it really depends on who the artists are and their vision of what the world should be and how power should be shared."

While she has long had a close relationship with Actors Theatre of Louisville, she says a former artistic director refused to perform a play it had commissioned because of fear its references to the pharmaceutical industry might offend a corporate sponsor. That play, now titled *The Breach*, about a group of teenagers in 1970s Kentucky who reconnect in the 1990s, also includes content about sexual violence that she describes as "challenging".

The Breach's premier was in France, translated into French, and it has been performed in London. But she hopes to see it staged in Kentucky someday, along with two other plays — one she has written and another she plans to write this summer — that she refers to as her Kentucky Trilogy.

Wallace said that being inducted into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame means a lot to her.

“Growing up in Kentucky and listening to people talk, that’s what gave me the foundation for the language I use in the theater,” she said. “Someone was asking me, ‘Kentucky meant so much to you. Why did you leave?’ I said I’ve never left. I live in England but I’ve never left Kentucky. The most powerful time for me about Kentucky was when I was a teenager. That is right there, all the time, with me.”

Selected Bibliography

Plays

- *In The Heart of America*
- *One Flea Spare*
- *The Inland Sea*
- *Slaughter City*
- *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*
- *The Girl Who Fell Through a Hole in Her Jumper* (with Bruce E. J. McLeod; licensed under the title *The Girl Who Fell Through a Hole in Her Sweater* in the United States)
- *The War Boys*
- *Things of Dry Hours*
- *Birdy* (an adaptation of William Wharton’s novel)
- *The Fever Chart: Three Visions of the Middle East*
- *Twenty One Positions: A Cartographic Dream of the Middle East* (with Lisa Schlesinger and Abdelfattah Abusrour)
- *The Hard Weather Boating Party*
- *One Short Sleep*
- *And I and Silence*
- *The Liquid Plain*
- *Night is a Room*
- *Barrel Wave*
- *The Return of Benjamin Lay* (produced at the Finborough Theatre with Marcus Rediker)
- *The Breach*
- *Returning to Haifa* (with Ismail Khalidi (writer))
- *Guernica, Gaza* (with Ismail Khalidi (writer))

Anthologies

- *Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora*
- *Double Exposure: Plays of the Jewish and Palestinian Diasporas*

Essays

- “Trump-ocalypse Now? Theater in the Age of Trump”
- “Radical Vision and Form” (interview)
- “Let the Right One In: On resistance, hospitality and new writing for the American stage”

Poetry

To Dance A Stony Field (Peterloo Poets Press)

Films

- *Lawn Dogs*
- *The War Boys*, co-written with Bruce E. J. McLeod
- *Flying Blind*, co-written with Bruce E. J. McLeod

Awards

- MacArthur Foundation Fellow (1999)
- Obie Award for best off-Broadway play (1997)
- Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (1994-1995, 1995-1996)
- Fellowship of Southern Writers Drama Award (1996)
- Joseph Kesselring Prize (1996)
- Horton Foote Award (2012)
- American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature (2015)
- Windham Campbell Prize for Drama (2013)

From: <https://carnegiecenterlex.org/hall-of-fame/naomi-wallace/>

Bruce McLeod

Bruce McLeod is a playwright, essayist, graphic artist and screenwriter. Born in Scotland, he later moved the US where he completed a doctorate in English Literature. He now resides in North Yorkshire. He has worked with his partner Naomi Wallace on numerous projects, including the plays *The Girl Who Fell Through the Hole in Her Jumper* (1994) and *In the Sweat* (1997); screenplays for *Lawn Dogs* (1997), *The War Boys* (2009), *Flying Blind* (2012), and *Cross My Mind* (2014).

From: <https://www.aurorametro.com/bruce-mcleod/>

Characters in the Play

Noil – The protagonist. A young girl who is strong (her name backwards is ‘Lion’), smart, and has a clear understanding of herself.

Crumbs-In-Pocket – The narrator. Is both in the action and a commentator of the action through singing (in this vein, functions much like that of the ancient Greek chorus).

Lord Principal Plagueworthy – The Antagonist. The Lord of the Castle and controller of the Mirror, Windows and Doors, and Roach.

Roach – A loyal servant to Lord PP who transforms to become a helper to Noil.

ItNose – All knowing... All Nose.

Mirror – Cursed without a face of their own, only able to reflect what they see and hear, causing a great sense of sadness and a lack of self-worth.

Windows & Doors – a chorus of stolen widows and doors, forced to march at the bidding of Lord PP.

Structures and Themes

Many elements come together to help tell the story of this play. While it may seem like a casual and fun story for audiences of all ages, Naomi Wallace and Bruce McLeod incorporate many storytelling techniques to craft a play worthy of deep study. Some of these techniques are built into the structure of the play and some are the themes woven into the narrative.

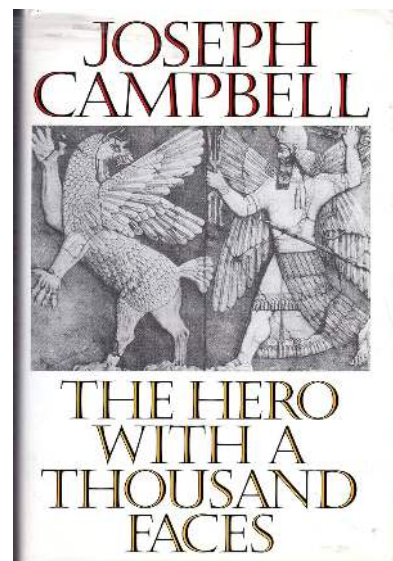
Structural Elements

Narratology

The use of a narrator is often overlooked when analyzing texts. What can be seen as easy way to navigate action, the use of the narrator goes back to the ancient Greek Chorus, who was seen as the most crucial part of the stories being performed. The Chorus was the ideal spectator who brought history and context into the narrative but also acted as a conduit for the audience and what was happening on stage. The chorus was both in the action as a representative demographic (i.e., members of the community) but also provided commentary on the action and imparted lessons to the audience.

The Hero's Journey

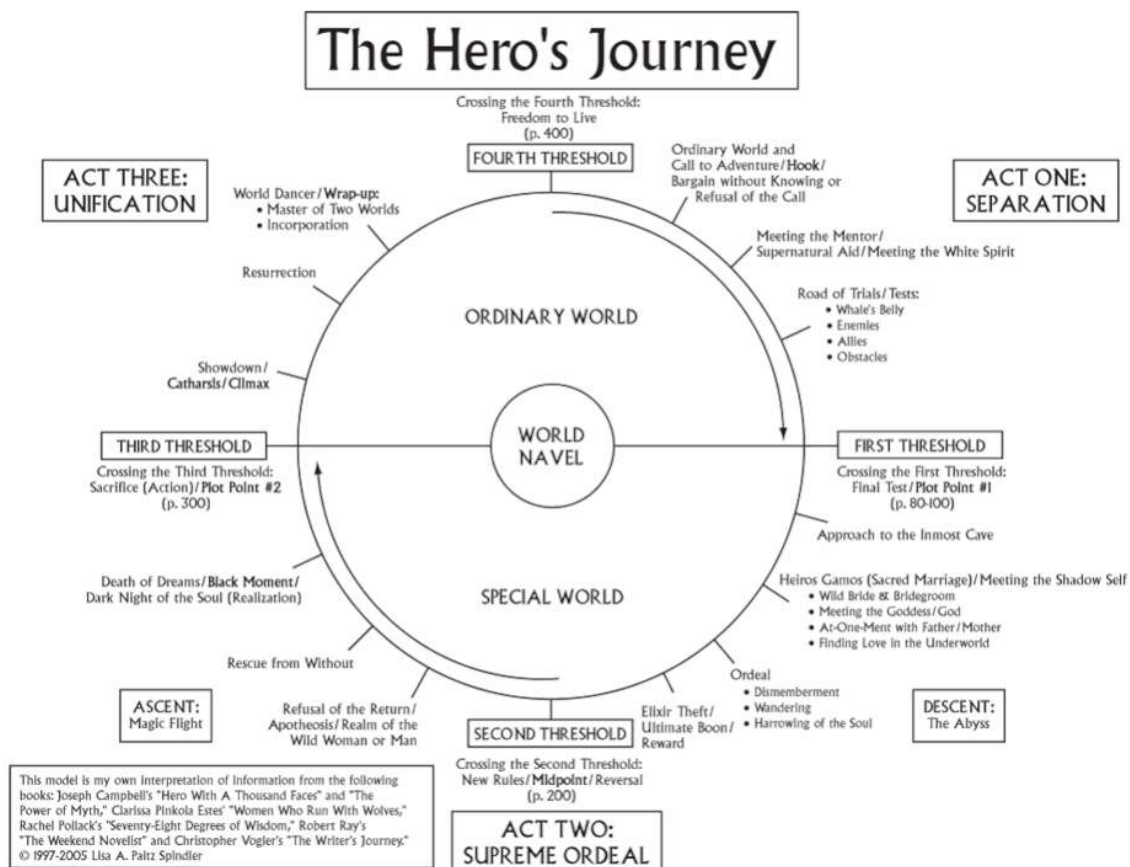
Joseph Campbell's 1949 text, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, is a definitive and influential text that pulled from the psychologies of Sigmund Freud's theories on the Oedipus complex as well as Carl Jung's work on archetypes and the collective unconscious. What Campbell's text does is give us a framework of a monomyth; illustrating that throughout human history and throughout the world, cultures (regardless of belief structure) used a similar storytelling method that tracked a number of stages that tracked a "hero" moving from their ordinary world to a world of wonder and otherworldly experiences. By going on these quests, the hero is challenged, met with allies and nemeses, and learns about

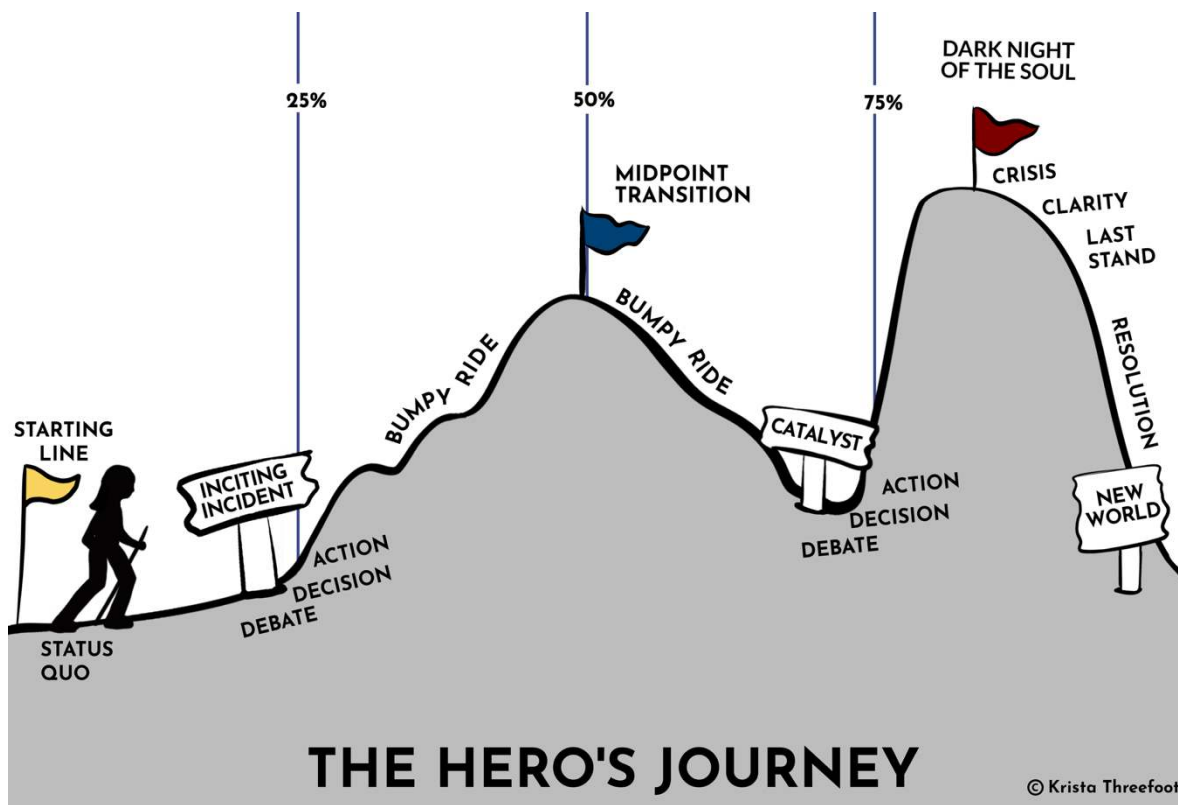


their inner and outer self. Ultimately, the hero returns to the normal world a changed and altered person.

While the stages shift and are emphasized to various degrees from culture to culture and story to story, the stages themselves are apparent and have become ubiquitous within dramatic storytelling on the stage, in cinema, and in print.

The following image shows a representation of the stages. While this shows the journey as being never-ending and/or cyclical, dramatic narratives often focus on only a portion of the hero's overall/life journey and represent the cycle as a linear structure (see the subsequent image).





This structure is ubiquitous in modern culture. For reference with your students based on the level, you can discuss the Hero's Journey using this small list of examples:

Books:

- *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien (1937)
- *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (1900)
- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1865)
- *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)

Films:

- *The Lion King* (1994)
- *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977)
- *The Matrix* (1999)
- *The Princess Bride* (1987)
- Almost any superhero film from the past twenty years

Themes

There is no such thing as a wrong theme. What is important to remember with theatre is that a theme is different than a topic. In theatre, a theme can be identified using the following formula:

$$\textit{Topic + Playwright's Commentary = Theme}$$

While the following topics are pertinent to this play, they are missing the playwright's commentary to elevate them to themes:

- overcoming adversity
- trust
- teamwork
- forgiveness
- staying true to yourself

The distinction is important because theatre is about ACTION. Characters are in pursuit of something they want (**Objective**) and are met by a challenge (**Obstacle**) that they must overcome (**Strategy/Tactics**). Therefore, everything we do in theatre must be tied to either an internal or external action. So, a more relevant list of themes using the above topics could be:

- To overcome adversity, you must stay strong and ask for help when needed
- Trusting yourself and others can be challenging but rewarding
- Working together and using teamwork can lead to success
- Forgiving people who have harmed you can be difficult, but it shows strength of character, compassion, and empathy
- Staying true to who you are is important as long as you are not hurting others

Framing "theme" as "message" and/or "moral of the story" can be a good way to get students to consider the playwright's commentary(ies) that lead to more fully fleshed out themes.

Discussion Questions

We always see a wide range of experiences from audiences. Some audience members are frequent theatre goers, whereas others have little to no experience seeing plays. Some are active theatre participants (actors, technicians, designers) whereas others have only read a small amount of plays as assignments in school.

We make no assumptions as to who is attending a production, so we have offered the previous information as well as the following to help get your students become engaged (and hopefully excited) about what they are going to see.

Feel free to use any of these questions based on the age and engagement of your students:

Preparing for the Play

1. **What is Theatre?** (theatre can be any live event where people are performing characters to an audience and trying to communicate an idea)
2. **What is a Play?** (the above as well as we see the character change/shift/grow from beginning to end)
3. **What is a Protagonist?** (Someone who drives the action of the story and/or all the action revolves around them. It's important to move away from the 'good guy vs. bad guy' dichotomy)
4. **What is an Antagonist?** (the person who is inhibiting the protagonist from achieving their goal)
5. **What stories do you like?** Why?
6. **What stories don't you like?** Why?
7. **What is a Hero?** (traits, qualities, goals – look to classical interpretations from Aristotle or read Arthur Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man" if you need some framing)

Debriefing the Play

1. What was Noil trying to achieve?
2. Did you understand what the other characters wanted? How did their wants/needs make you feel?
3. What excited you about the play? Why?
4. What is the message of this play? What do you think about that message?
5. Could you relate to Noil? What about the other characters?
6. In addition to narratology and The Hero's Journey, what other storytelling techniques are utilized?

Activities

With the proliferation of The Hero's Journey throughout pop culture, students are more aware of these structures and character traits than they may be aware. The following activities are meant to enable their critical eye to have a cognizant awareness of the structures when they see them.

The Hero's Journey *(developed and available from BeSpokenClassroom.com)*

1. **Hero's Journey Map:** Have students create a map of their favorite hero's journey, using symbols to represent the different stages.
2. **Hero's Journey Storyboard:** Have students create a storyboard of their favorite hero's journey, including a brief description of each stage.
3. **Hero's Journey Infographic:** Have students create an infographic of their favorite hero's journey.

Creating a Play:

1. In pairs, small groups, or as a class (depending on the appropriate dynamic), write a short scene using the following steps:
 - a. Character A: What is their name? How old are they? What do they want (*Objective*)?
 - b. Character B: What is their name? How old are they? What do they want (*Objective*)?
 - c. What is the relationship between A and B? (note: relationships create varying power dynamics and this dynamic will influence how the characters interact with each other)
 - d. Is the Objective from A in conflict with the Objective from B? If so, how are they going to get what they want (their *strategy*)? If the goals coincide with the other, what is stopping them from working together to achieve their goal)
 - NOTE: Theatre is rooted in conflict and overcoming challenges, so conflict must be present for this to be a play.

The conflict is what allows characters to grow and become stronger people.

- e. Write 10-14 lines of dialogue (about 5-7 lines for each character) where we can see Characters A and B pursuing their goal.

- NOTE: Dialogue is one of the hardest things write. It needs to sound natural but not formal, characters need to state what they want without coming right out and saying it, and it must avoid “telling” or using a lot of exposition. Dialogue is action and must reflect that – dialogue is how characters pursue, and hopefully achieve, their objectives

2. After completing the writing, invite students to act out their scenes.

Creating a Production:

1. Using the plays written by students (or another text known to them), talk about what would be needed to bring the text to life on stage. While students will think of everything under the sun, try to keep it simple and stick to: Scenery, Lighting, Costumes, Sound, and Props
2. **Scenery: What does the stage/space look like?** Keep this rooted in the fact that this is play, not a movie – it exists in single, defined space (so rocket ships and speeding locomotives need to be reimagined in a way that will be doable on stage).
3. **Lighting/Sound: What is the mood/tone we can set through the use of light and sound?** Playing songs and movie scores can help illustrate the efficacy of sound. Talking about the lighting in the classroom versus the lighting in their homes can help talk about the mood(s) of those locations.
4. **Costumes: How can we using clothing to a.) tell us who the characters are, and b.) reveal something thematic?** Think of colors (purple is often used for royalty, red can be passion, light blue is tranquil whereas dark blue can denote power). What we wear is related to weather, occasion, class, and many other variables, and it is also an expression of who we are and how we want others to view us.
5. **Props:** What are the essential needs? There are the things we want (everything!) and then there are the necessities to tell the story.

Defining a Hero (also developed and available from BeSpokenClassroom.com):

Hero Profile

Directions: Identify a person, living or dead, who you would classify as a "hero." This person does not have to be famous. Fill out the profile below with information and details about this person. Then, think about why you picked this person and write your own, unique definition of a hero.

Name: _____

Birth / Death Date(s): _____

Quote

List of Heroic Traits

Sketch a picture of your hero.

Accomplishments

My definition of a hero is...
