

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

PLAYWRITING:
CHARACTERISATION &
DIALOGUE

STATE THEATRE
COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA

CHARACTERISATION

Your characters are the people who will speak to the audience and help communicate the main idea, themes and/or purpose of your play. They are strongly linked to the what, where, when, why and who questions outlined in the “Getting Started” resource (statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources).

It can be helpful to have a list of your main characters before you start writing, including basic elements like age, race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic background, health (glasses, able-bodied, overweight, etc.) if these things are relevant.

Going beyond the surface level, it’s also important to consider their main personality traits and what motivates them throughout the play. Who are they? What do they want? How does this change over the course of the play? You’ll also want to consider how the characters relate to one another at the beginning of the play - friends, strangers, family, etc.

Once you have these basics down, it may be easier to start thinking about your characters more deeply.

WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS

Creating believable characters is important. Here are some questions and ideas to consider as you create your characters and have them navigate the situations presented in your play:

- What is their family like? Do they have living parents and siblings? What are their relationships like? How might this affect the way the character lives their life or reacts to certain situations?
- What was their life like growing up? Was their family wealthy or struggling? What sort of schooling did they have? How did they find school? How might these circumstances affect their current situation?
- What do they do for work? How do they feel about their job?

While these areas of each character’s life may not be directly referenced in the play, having these aspects established will help you to determine how they might react or what they might say in the situations presented within your play. You will probably want to explore these questions and ideas only for your main character(s), but they could be used for each character in the play.

ACTIVITY

Write a few paragraphs from the perspective of the character. Pretend to be one of your characters. Get a friend to ask you questions and respond as you think that character would. Make notes directly afterwards detailing any new thoughts or observations.



DIALOGUE

Think about the ways you use dialogue in the play and how this works for each character.

- How does each character talk? How might this reflect the background you have created for them?
- Is there a word or phrase the character uses a lot, either as an individual, or collectively (e.g. town slang)?
- Are these elements already in your script? If so, do they feel realistic and natural, or serve another purpose? If not, how might you work these into your script to add nuance to the character/s?

Ensure your dialogue advances the plot and deepens the audience's understanding of a character at the same time. Read your dialogue aloud to check that it sounds realistic and flows well.

ACTIVITY

Gather a group of friends or family members to read through the dialogue of your play.

Pay attention to whether the conversations feel authentic and honest, and whether they progress the plot and help audiences to better understand the characters. Have your script in front of you while reading and make notes or changes where appropriate.

Ask your friends and family for their thoughts on the believability of the dialogue.

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