

Let's Make a Scene!

According to the dictionary, a scene is “a sequence of continuous action in a play, movie, opera, or book.”

It serves in scripts—plays, television, film—in much the same way as a paragraph does in a book.

Just as paragraphs combine to create chapters, scenes combine to make an act. Just as paragraphs have a beginning, middle and ending—an introductory sentence, middle sentences and a conclusion—scenes, too, have a beginning, middle and end. Just as paragraphs have a topic sentence, a central idea—so, too, does a scene have a central idea or point of tension that drives the action to the end of the scene.

Elements of a Scene

A CHARACTER or CHARACTERS. If you have just one character, you can have a MONOLOGUE, a conversation with the audience or with themselves. Two or more characters and you can create DIALOGUE, conversations between the characters. In addition to conversations, characters have ACTIONS. They move, they gesture, they come off, EXIT, or on, ENTER, the STAGE, the space within which the characters perform.

A scene also usually has a SETTING, a description of when the action of the scene takes place, the time the action takes place and sometimes a bit of narrative that helps the audience know what has proceeded the scene, if needed.

Make Your Scene

In the workshop, we created scenes from headlines in a newspaper—the Shakespearean approach—for, as we all know, [Shakespeare](#) read about the historic Julius Caesar in an old copy of *Roman Times* that survived to the 17th century (see attachment 1) and created a historical fiction, the play [Julius Caesar](#). But playwright [Lynn Nottage](#) began her Pulitzer Prize winning play, [Sweat](#), by going one step beyond: by interviewing residents of Reading, Pennsylvania.

Since we did/will do a scene strictly based on information from a news source, *a la* Shakespeare, let's take a stab (not like Brutus) at working directly from a people source—an interview.

Just come up with two or three interview questions and solicit responses from a couple of classmates. You can ask questions about the cafeteria food (“How has the pizza here changed your life” and “What is your favorite food item here and why”). From the answers you can make your own Headline (example: “To Pizza or Not to Pizza, That is the Question”).

Supplemental materials below: Let's Make a Scene jumpstart worksheet, supplemental pieces on the *Roman Times* headline about Caesar; the writing of *Sweat* (by Hatza – attachment 2); links to bios on Shakespeare and Lynn Nottage and info on their plays *Julius Caesar* and *Sweat*, all from Wikipedia (in the event the hyperlinks don't take you to them). There is also information on proper play formatting.

A scene isn't a car parked in a parking lot; that is, it is not a thing sitting unmoving like an apple in a basket about to become part of a painter's still life. It is a car that a character is driving, possibly with a passenger (another character), from point A through a middle B, and, finally to an end, point C.

What now?

Create CHARACTERS, ACTION and DIALOGUE. Toss in a little beginning, middle and end. You need to come up with a SETTING for your scene as well. Where and when is it taking place? You are only basing your scene on the interview you conducted. You don't have to stick to that story's setting. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* has been around for hundreds of years and the story had been around for hundreds of years before Shakespeare. The play has been set in Rome but also in Nazi Germany. Let your imagination be free.

To get you started, write down a couple of ideas for SETTING below:

1. SETTING (Where/When):

Next, CHARACTERS. Stick to coming up with one or two:

2. CHARACTERS:

Lastly, what are your characters going to do? What's the tension? In other words, where do they begin, where do they end and what happens in-between?

3. TENSION/BEGINNING-MIDDLE-END:

Don't forget ACTIONS and DIALOGUE/MONOLOGUE!

And don't forget – have fun!

THE ROMAN TRIBUNE

BREAKING NEWS

Caesar Assassinated; Brutus, Others Implicated

What did not happen on countless battlefields has happened this day. Julius Caesar, the great hero of Rome and of the Republic was struck down and killed by Roman citizens claiming the deed was done on behalf of the Republic. Caesar, fresh from his triumphs overseas, was back in Rome and there had been talk of making him Emperor.



George Hatza: Lynn Nottage play 'Sweat' a gift to Reading

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage ("Ruined") was so inspired by a story in The New York Times in 2011 that she devoted much of the last few years creating art because of it.

And she's still not finished.

This remarkable writer and visionary artist spent two years interviewing residents of Reading and Berks County from all walks of life in response to the Times story citing our city as the poorest in the nation.

She saw it as an opportunity to explore what she believed was the beginning of the decline of the middle class in this country.

In addition to a play, entitled "Sweat," which recently premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Ore., she is working on a permanent artistic installation, to be housed locally, incorporating video and other forms of art not yet disclosed.

George Hatza: Lynn Nottage play 'Sweat' a gift (cont'd)

It is a gift to the city, Nottage has said, with the thought that its salvation lies in the arts.

"Sweat" is set in Reading, and it explores what the rumors of layoffs and a potential shutdown of a manufacturing plant do to a group of close friends who have known each other for years. Some are white, some are black, some are Latino.

And as events unfold, the choices made by the plant begin tearing away at the fabric of this onetime band of buddies, as well as the community at large....



Links to Playwright Bios and Information on Their Plays



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Caesar_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Caesar_(play))



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynn_Nottage

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweat_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweat_(play))

Miscellaneous Information on Playwriting Format

<http://www.playwrightslocal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Samuel-French-Formatting-Guide.pdf>

COVER PAGE

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A Very Short Play

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CHARACTERS/SETTING PAGE

Cast of Characters

THE REVEREND HARRIET “HARRY” JONES. Pastor of the Church of the Redeemer in a part of Greater Los Angeles once called South Central.

DOCTOR IBRAHIM “ABE” HASHMI. An ob-gyn in a practice in the area, an area with a large undocumented (and now illegal) population in need of medical services. The other doctors in the practice have warned him to desist treating this population as it threatens the practice as a whole. Though Muslim, he has been friends with HARRY for years, working with her on interfaith councils. They fast together during Lent and Ramadan.

Time and Place

The play takes place in HARRY’s office. It is late, in the not-too-distant (hopefully, alternative) future of circa 2056.

STAGE SET-UP/BEGINNING OF DIALOGUE

Setting: Spots on two chairs, if possible, a table for a desk between them for HARRY's papers, a cellphone and cups of tea.

Before rise: The sound of a ringing phone, going unanswered.

At rise: The play starts with the phone finishing its last few rings while HARRY ignores it. She is working on her Sunday sermon, occasionally, referencing her pages to edit.

ABE enters, carrying two cups of tea. He makes himself comfortable in the unoccupied chair and sneaks one of the cups in front of HARRY.

Without stopping her work, HARRY starts the conversation.

HARRY

It is written: beware Islamic doctors bearing tea.

ABE

(smiling)

Let me know when it is adjacent to a House of Allah and I'll be more reverent.

(The phone rings again. HARRY talks over it.)

HARRY

Per the Quran, Jesus is one of your prophets. So I think I'm safe in saying *mi casa, es su casa*.

ABE

Ronald Reagan?

HARRY

The opening of this week's sermon.

(HARRY and ABE both look at her ringing phone. It stops.

(HARRY searches for the start of her sermon, reads a bit.)