

"Hey! Give Me That Back!"

Writing Your Own Mini-Play

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By Paige Goodwin for the UCR Gluck 2020 Digital DIY Curriculum

Picture This

It's Friday night. You're sitting at home, scrolling through Netflix. Everything feels kinda... well, boring. You've seen everything you'd want to watch already, and everything else — it just doesn't sound like something you'd like AT ALL.

But what if you could write your own TV show or movie — something like *Steven Universe* or *Descendants* that every kid in the country could watch on a Friday night? Or maybe you want to write a new musical like *Hamilton*.

Close your eyes for a second. What would your story be about? Would it be about a superhero? Animals in a zoo? Maybe it's about you and your best friends from school or the kids in your neighborhood. You could even write about your family, or aliens on Saturn.

If you can think it, you can write it.

What does it take to write a story that actors act, like a play or movie? You'll learn today by writing your own play!

Writing a mini play is way easier than it sounds... except wait, what's a play?

A **play** is a performance of a story, in script form, with actors.

Scripts are used for musicals, plays, your favorite TV shows, movies, and even for cut scenes in video games! You might be a future movie writer, video game creator, or even actor. People who have these jobs know how to write their own plays.

All it takes is **paper** and your **imagination!** (Hold on — you know what paper and imagination are right? Okay, cool. I thought so!)

Today we'll write a short **mini-play**, or a single scene with two characters (a protagonist and an antagonist and a conflict) in a few simple steps.

We'll need to use our **writer's toolbox**, though. Come back to this when you don't recognize a word or you just need to remember what it means.

WRITER'S TOOLBOX

Protagonist: Your main character — they should get what they want (or something close to it) at the end of your play.

Antagonist: A character who a) wants the same thing as your protagonist (like the same soccer ball to practice shooting) or b) wants the opposite of what your protagonist (no one wants the ball because they're using the field for something else).

Objective: What each character WANTS.

Dialogue: What your characters SAY.

Stage Directions: What your characters DO with their bodies.

Conflict: A disagreement between characters. This is different than a fight.

Now it's time to write our script. There are only **FIVE** steps between you being a normal kid and you being a kid who could write the next *Spongebob Squarepants*.

1) Character Worksheet

We'll create our Protagonist and Antagonist and figure out their objectives — what do they want in this disagreement?

2) Setting and Conflict Worksheet

Where does your scene take place? We'll also figure out what the conflict, or disagreement is between our characters.

3) Emotion Journey Worksheet

Conflict cause characters to have emotions! And each character will go on an emotion journey in your scene. We'll decide what those journeys look like together.

4) Conflict & Dialogue Builder Worksheets

First we'll decide what steps our protagonist will take to get their objective. Using a new example play, we'll try writing building dialogue.

5) Writing the Script

Taking everything we've done, you'll write your very own script that can be performed with friends.

Here's a scene I wrote using those steps. I'll show you how I filled out the worksheets for it, too:

HINT: Use the example script at the end when you're ready to start writing your own scene to see how to **format**, or set up your paper.

Example 1 - The iPhone

The iPhone

Scene 1

(In the Kitchen. Paige and her Mom sit at the table.)

PAIGE

Hey Mom, I did my homework. Can I please have my phone back?

(Paige reaches for the phone.)

MOM

No.

PAIGE

Okay, I'm sorry I was using it in class. I promise I won't do it again. Can I have it back now?

MOM

Yeah, nice try.

PAIGE

I... need to ask Katie about the math test tomorrow, and I need my phone.

MOM

Maybe later. I have too much to do around the house to go get your phone from where I'm keeping it.

(Paige taps her chin for a while)

PAIGE

Wait, what if I do the dishes? Then could I have my phone back?

MOM

You know, I think that might work. Make sure to dry them, too.

(Mom hands Paige the dish towel. Paige rolls her eyes, then takes it.)

This tells you what scene number this is. We start on one.

This is my title. You'll write it nice and big at the top.

In this packet, you'll learn to write your own play that looks something like the one I wrote.

The first step before we start is to pick the following: **character relationship**, **setting**, and **objective**. We'll go into further detail with each of these later, but you'll see that there are three choices for each of these. Some of the choices make a lot more sense than others (like a ball for the object on a field as the setting), but with creativity, you could make any combination of choices work. Ask yourself these questions:

Who are your characters? What setting are they in? And finally, with those characters in that setting, what objective makes the most sense?

Once you know these things, you can write your play.

Check **one** under each category:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Character Relationship | | |
| Kid/Grown Up | Sibling/Sibling | Friend/Friend |
| Setting | | |
| School | Home | Sports Field/Court |
| Objective | | |
| Phone | Something to Eat | The Ball |

For my play, I would have chosen Kid/Grown Up (since it's about Paige and her Mom), Home, and Phone.

HINT: You'll check the same thing on the worksheets when they ask. So, if you picked "School" here, on your Setting/Conflict worksheet, you'll choose "School" again.

Character Worksheet: How To

1) For your play, you picked one of three relationships:

Kid / Grown-Up

Sibling/Sibling

Friend/Friend

2) Now that you know what relationship you're writing about, you'll need to choose which character is your **protagonist** and your **antagonist**.

3) Your protagonist will end up getting what they want (their **objective**) by the end of the play. Your antagonist should want the same thing, or the exact opposite. For example, if your character wants a phone, maybe the antagonist wants something in exchange for the phone. If your character wants a soccer ball, maybe your antagonist wants that soccer ball as well. This objective will be based on the object you picked before.

4) Choose each character's **name** and **age**.

5) In a couple words, tell me **what they look like**. Are they tall? Do they have brown hair? Do they wear a silly hat? Are they in their soccer uniform? All of this will help us to learn about who this character is. If you're stuck, it's more than okay to base your character on someone you know.

6) Pick a **strength** for your character. Are they smart? Good at compromising? Funny? This will be what they try to win the argument using.

7) Pick a **weakness** for your character. Are they stubborn? Do they fall for practical jokes easy? This will be what the other character uses against them.

Character Worksheet

The Who(s) of Your Play

EXAMPLE 1 - The iPhone

Protagonist - Your Main Character

Name: Paige

Age: 12

What they Look Like: She has brown hair and is tall.

Objective: To get back her iPhone.

Strength: She is smart.

Weakness: She agrees to things before thinking.

Antagonist - Your Opposing Character

Name: Mom

Age: 45

What they Look Like: Mom is tall and has blonde hair.

Objective (remember, this should be the SAME, or the OPPOSITE):

Mom wants Paige to do housework before she gets her phone back.

Strength: Mom is really nice.

Weakness: Mom is easily persuaded.

Character Worksheet

The Who(s) of Your Play

Protagonist - Your Main Character

Name: _____

Age: _____

What they Look Like: _____

Objective: _____

Strength: _____

Weakness: _____

Antagonist - Your Opposing Character

Name: _____

Age: _____

What they Look Like: _____

Objective (remember, this should be the SAME, or the OPPOSITE):

Strength: _____

Weakness: _____

Setting/Conflict Worksheet: How To

1) For your play, we need to know our **setting**, or where we are. Are we at home? At school? On a sports field? This will be where the characters have their conflict.

2) Next, you will want to tell me some details about this setting so that you know exactly where we are. Is the house big? Is the school in California? Is the sports field in a park or behind a high school?

3) Next, we need to know about the **objective**, which is what will cause your conflict. Choose between a phone, something to eat, or a sports ball. You'll see some of these choices might match easier with others like school - phone / house - something to eat / sports field - sports ball. However, even kids on a team need something to eat. You can be as creative as you'd like!

4) Last, you'll tell me some details about the object. What kind of phone is it? Is it the only one in the house? What kind of food is it? Is it special? Is the sports ball needed for a game? Does one character own the object? This will help us know why there's a conflict. If there is only one of something and both characters want it, then, boom — conflict.

Setting And Conflict Worksheet

The Where and The Why of Your Play

EXAMPLE 1 - The iPhone

Setting – Where Are We?

Check One:

School

Home

Sports Field/Court

Describe Your Setting (What does it look like? What time of day is it? What state is it in?)

This is the kitchen in a house. It is a big kitchen. It is around dinner time.

It is in California.

Conflict - What Thing Do Your Characters Want?

Check One:

Phone

Something To Eat

The Ball

Describe Your Item (What does it look like? Why is it important? Is it the best or only one?)

The phone is an iPhone XR. It is white with a case. It has all of Paige's texts.

She can't talk to her friends without it. She doesn't have another phone.

Setting And Conflict Worksheet

The Where and The Why of Your Play

Setting – Where Are We?

Check One:

School

Home

Sports Field/Court

Describe Your Setting (What does it look like? What time of day is it? What state is it in?)

Conflict – What Thing Do Your Characters Want?

Check One:

Phone

Something To Eat

The Ball

Describe Your Item (What does it look like? Why is it important? Is it the best or only one?)

Emotion Journey Worksheet: How To

- 1) Each character will go on an emotional journey in the scene. One character will definitely get what they want. The other might not. They might get something close to what they want.
- 2) Scenes are interesting because they map emotions. Characters will start with one emotion, then finish on another. Often, they have an emotion in between.
- 3) Choose the **Starting Emotion** for your **protagonist** to start on. HINT: since they have to earn what they want, they won't start out happy, most likely.
- 4) Then skip ahead and choose the **Ending Emotion** for your protagonist for the end. HINT: they'll be happy to get what they want at the end, so pick the emotion that reflects that.
- 5) Now go back and choose the **Middle Emotion** for your protagonist. How do they feel before they go from happy to sad?
- 6) Now do the same for your **antagonist**. The antagonist will have the power at the beginning of the play, so they'll probably go from happy to sad through the show, or satisfied to angry. Pick the **Starting Emotion**.
- 7) Then go back and pick the **Ending Emotion** for the antagonist. Does the antagonist lose? Is there compromise? Decide here, then choose their emotion.
- 8) Finally, pick the **Middle Emotion** for your antagonist. Where are they in the middle?

Emotion Journey Worksheet

Mapping the Reactions of Your Characters

EXAMPLE

Protagonist

Name: Paige

Starting Emotion

Check One: Sad Frustrated Angry

Middle Emotion

Check One: Confused Defeated Angry

Ending Emotion

Check One: Happy Victorious Excited

Antagonist

Name: Mom

Starting Emotion

Check One: Happy Vengeful Excited

Middle Emotion

Check One: Confused Defeated Angry

Ending Emotion

Check One: Sad Frustrated Happy

Emotion Journey Worksheet

Mapping the Reactions of Your Characters

Protagonist

Name: _____

Starting Emotion

Check One: Sad Frustrated Angry

Middle Emotion

Check One: Confused Defeated Angry

Ending Emotion

Check One: Happy Victorious Excited

Antagonist

Name: _____

Starting Emotion

Check One: Happy Vengeful Excited

Middle Emotion

Check One: Confused Defeated Angry

Ending Emotion

Check One: Sad Frustrated Happy

Conflict Builder Worksheet: How To

In order to get what their **objective**, your **protagonist** will try three different things. Your **antagonist** will agree to the last one.

Solution One one should be an option that is easy for the protagonist. Think about it this way: if you want to get something from someone, the first option you'll offer is the easiest option for you. In "The iPhone", Paige hopes that making a promise to not use the phone in class again will work. That is really easy for her to do.

Your antagonist can't like this, or the play would be over. So why doesn't Mom like this? Well, maybe Mom doesn't believe Paige will keep her promise.

For **Solution Two**, the protagonist will offer something that takes a little more effort for them. For Paige in "The iPhone", that's telling Mom she needs to text her friend about the homework. This isn't as fun as playing games or sending funny texts, but it's a quick task.

Again, your antagonist can't agree to this. Mom doesn't agree because Mom is busy around the house. Mom makes a hint as to what offer she'll accept.

For the **Last Solution**, the protagonist must offer the most difficult compromise. Paige will do the dishes in exchange for the phone. This is a lot more effort than making a promise, or sending one text to her friend, but since Mom wouldn't give up the phone, Paige has to make this offer.

Your antagonist will agree to this offer because it benefits them and helps them achieve their objective as well. For Mom, that's a cleaner house.

Think about how your protagonist will start with something easy, then work their way up to bigger offers to try and get the antagonist to do what they want.

Conflict Builder Worksheet

Mapping What Happens in Your Play

EXAMPLE 1 - The iPhone

Your **protagonist** will try different techniques, or options, to get your antagonist to give them what they want. Ultimately, this will end in a **compromise**, or the protagonist getting what they want.

Let's map out the three options:

1)

Protagonist first solution: Paige tells her mom her homework is done.

Why the antagonist doesn't like it: Mom still doesn't want to give her the phone.

2)

Protagonist second solution: Paige tells Mom she's sorry for losing her phone in class.

Why the antagonist doesn't like it: An apology isn't enough because Mom has work to do.

3)

Protagonist final option: Paige offers to do the dishes.

Why the antagonist says yes: Mom gets help around the house.

Conflict Builder Worksheet

Mapping What Happens in Your Play

Your **protagonist** will try different techniques, or options, to get your antagonist to give them what they want. Ultimately, this will end in a **compromise**, or the protagonist getting what they want.

Let's map out the three options:

1)

Protagonist first option: _____

Why the antagonist doesn't like it: _____

2)

Protagonist second option: _____

Why the antagonist doesn't like it: _____

3)

Protagonist final option: _____

Why the antagonist says yes: _____

Dialogue Builder Worksheet: How To

In plays and movies, the only way we find out information is if someone says it or shows it. The dialogue is what the characters say and the stage direction is what the characters do.

Because in our play, our characters are going to talk about how they're feeling instead of trying to hurt each other to get their objective, our dialogue must show the conflict and build on top of itself. What I mean by that, is it should be exciting!

In the new example *The Ball*, Charlie, our **protagonist**, is upset that Bob, our **antagonist**, is hogging the ball. **Charlie and Bob both want the same objective -- they want to play with the ball.** Charlie tells Bob he's upset to start the scene.

Bob gets upset that Charlie wants to take the ball from him. Charlie now has two options — Charlie could start a verbal fight, or Charlie could try and appeal to Bob. Charlie might lose a verbal fight, so Charlie instead tries to suggest a compromise by saying “Let’s do something different.”

1) Now decide what Charlie might suggest. Is it that they take turns? Is it that they play together? Does Charlie suggest a new game entirely?

2) Uh oh. Whatever Charlie suggested, Bob doesn't like. Now you'll decide why Bob doesn't like it. Does he need the ball? Does he not want to play with Charlie?

Your play will have **conflict** that builds. If you were to finish writing this scene, Charlie would suggest something else. Bob might have another issue with that. Charlie then would suggest a final compromise — maybe he reminds Bob that Bob would rather go play basketball instead, or apologizes. Bob then agrees to this, and Charlie gets the ball, or the two boys play something else instead.

When you write your own play, your **protagonist** will need to try a couple different things to get their way with the **antagonist**.

Dialogue Builder Worksheet

The Story of A Play

EXAMPLE 2 - The Ball

Example

CHARLIE

Hey, I don't like that you're hogging the ball.

BOB

Well I want to play with it! Too bad!

CHARLIE

What if we both try something different?

Now you try writing the next line of these two different lines of dialogue:

1)

BOB

Well, what do you suggest?

CHARLIE

Maybe we could each take turns playing with the ball.

I should go first.

2)

BOB

Wait, that's not fair.

CHARLIE

What do you mean it's not fair?

BOB

You want to go first, but I just got the ball. I should go first.

That's super unfair.

Dialogue Builder Worksheet

The Story of A Play

The Ball

Example

CHARLIE
Hey, I don't like that you're hogging the ball.

BOB
Well, I want to play with it. Too bad!

CHARLIE
What if we both do something different?

Now you try writing the next line of these two different lines of dialogue:

1)

BOB
Well, what do you suggest?

CHARLIE

2)

BOB
Wait, that's not fair.

CHARLIE
What do you mean it's not fair?

BOB

Play Format Helper

It's Time to Write!

PUT YOUR TITLE NICE AND BIG HERE

Scene 1

(Tell us your information about your setting from your **Setting Worksheet** in these parentheses.)

PROTAGONIST NAME

Write their **dialogue**, or what they say here.

(If your actors need to do something with their bodies, like reach for a phone, put it in these parenthesis. It's a **stage direction**.)

ANTAGONIST NAME

Write their **dialogue** here.

Example

The iPhone

Scene 1

(In the Kitchen. Paige and her Mom sit at the table.)

PAIGE

Hey Mom, I did my homework. Can I please have my phone back?

(Paige reaches for the phone.)

MOM

No.

It's Time To Write Your Play!

- 1) Get a blank piece of **paper**, or a new blank **document** on your computer. Choose the one you are more comfortable with.
- 2) Read and review all the information you've filled out on your **Character Builder** worksheet, your **Setting/Conflict** worksheet, your **Emotion Builder** worksheet, and your **Conflict Builder** worksheet. These will be used to write your play.
- 3) Look at the example play — **The iPhone** as well as the **Dialogue Builder** worksheet for the play "The Ball" for inspiration. These don't have your play information on them, but they show you an example of how to write your scene.
- 4) Look over the **Play Format Helper** on the page before this for setting up your paper.
- 5) Start your first line with your **protagonist** telling your **antagonist** their **objective**. In "The iPhone", Paige tells mom she wants her phone. In "The Ball", Charlie tells Bob he wants the ball.
- 6) Write your scene, with your protagonist trying different choices to get their objective, and each character taking an emotion journey.

I'm Done... Now What?

Well, first — **Congratulations!** You are now a playwright who has written a scene.

You can stop here if you want, and perform the script. Get an audience either at home or on video conferencing software like Zoom, and perform your play. Have an actor read for each character. **Enjoy the applause!**

Or, you can keep going! Full plays and movies have many scenes. Each one has an **objective**. Think about "The iPhone" — what happens in the next scene if Paige brings her phone to school in the morning and her teacher is mad? What if Mom decides in the next scene that Paige didn't do the dishes well enough?

You can add **more characters**, and more **settings**. For each of these, you'll want to do a new character sheet, as well as new setting and objective sheets. You might notice, as your play goes on, that you need new choices than the ones on the worksheet. That's okay! You're now the playwright, so you don't have to use the exact worksheets anymore.

Have fun writing and performing your play!