

ANATOMY OF A TEN-MINUTE PLAY

Notes from Kickoff Workshop, December 2, 2014, Mary J. L. Black Library
(Facilitated by Cathi Grandfield)

INTRODUCTIONS

Workshop participants included members of Cambrian Players, New Noise Productions, Frankly Scarlet, Cambrian Improv, Thunder Bay Melodrama, Magnus Theatre, Imaginarium Studios, Rogue Productions, Eleanor Drury, the former Kam Theatre Lab, 807 Improv, Way Way Off Broadway Players, and Magnus Young Company, as well as Northwestern Ontario Writers Workshop and Community Arts & Heritage Education Project. Workshop participants introduced themselves and their connection to 10x10.

Enormous thanks to the founders of 10x10—Janis Swanson, Colin Stewart, Sheena Albanese, and Lawrence Badanai, for building this ship and navigating two successful voyages. Now we undertake a third voyage into some uncharted waters!

10x10's new steering team: Cathi Grandfield, Artistic Director
Sheena Albanese, Director of Professional Development
Jelena Psenicnik, Production Manager
Marion Agnew, General Manager

A script is a not a play, but a blueprint. The play is created by actors and audience: eyes, breath, spit, and passion. Tonight's workshop will explore ways to make the best blueprint for other artists to inhabit and bring to life.

OPENING ACTIVITY: WHAT A CHARACTER!

Remember the plays you've seen in your life, the plays in which you've acted or directed, and the ones you've read. Notice the first answer that comes to mind when I ask you to think of an unforgettable character—a vivid, memorable character with whom you made a strong connection.

1. WRITE – Character's name (if you know it). Write name of play, and playwright (if you know it).
2. Now think WHY—what made you identify/connect? Write that, too! Use the whole box!
3. SHARE – Turn to the person next to you and tell each other WHO your character is and WHY you remember them so vividly. Take a few moments.

NAME:
PLAY:
PLAYWRIGHT:
WHY:
QUEST:

4. (Follow up) – Now ask yourself: what did my character WANT MOST? Write a word or phrase.

Characters are the way we engage with a play. Now we will meet three characters in a classic ten-minute play, because the best way to learn how to make theatre is to see theatre!

PLAY READING

Workshop participants enjoyed a reading performed by Alex Jecchinis, Andrew Paulsen, and Sean Jesseau, directed by Sheena Albanese.

DISCUSS PLAY

Discussion of our initial response to the play. (What did you notice/like?) In a moment, we will look at how the play works; for now, think about what it *means*.

PURPOSE OF THEATRE

A. WHY THEATRE?

Let us think now on the nature of silence

On the act of regarding another

That is not the other

But rather another

fellow being on this earth.

[from **On the Act of Regarding Another: Some thoughts on live performance, silence and fragility** by Caridad Svich, 2014]

We started with a discussion of how we felt about the play, because theatre is a place we come to build values—not just individual values, but community values. Theatre is not isolationist, but meant for neighbourhoods. Live theatre requires an audience, a community of live, thinking people of disparate views. A place to *imaginatively address our differences and disagreements*, in a safe structure apart from dire consequences. Theatre invites us, not merely to watch, but to witness. It is a place to challenge our assumptions, to deconstruct and reconstruct values; so theatre is about questions beautifully asked, not answers. It is the job of the audience after the play to work toward answers. This is why it's essential to discuss plays, in order to sort and build community values. This year, 10x10 will provide opportunities for groups of us to see plays and engage in talk-back sessions afterward, to help build our community of 10x10 and also the larger community of Thunder Bay.

All the arts help us to build and refine community in different ways; the art of theatre is core to *how we treat each other*, how we choose to make peace or war. The essence of drama is CONFLICT.

B. WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Participants offered a variety of definitions of conflict. There are many ways to describe and understand this concept.

In simple terms, conflict occurs when one character wants something badly and another character opposes this want. In a more complex story, two characters have different agendas which are not compatible and block each other's efforts.

Both the want and the opposition need to be important, necessary, and urgent in order for the audience to care. Common motives are money, love, or *power*.

ANALYSIS OF PLAY

Group discussion:

1. CHARACTER: Who is the main character? Who is the antagonist? Why is there a third character?) What does each *want*? What does he do to get it?
2. CONFLICT: What opposes/stops each character from getting what he wants?
3. STAKES: What will each character lose if he doesn't get what he wants?

Actors read the play again, stopping and starting in order to explore:

4. SET UP: How does the play establish the world we're in? How is each character introduced? How does the play reveal what each character wants?
5. CENTRAL CONFLICT: Conflict revealed in the first line! The story's beginning (the inciting incident) is implied; the action starts in the middle. What is the dramatic quest which will resolve by the play's end?
6. COMPLICATIONS: What complicates the quest and builds suspense? What do we initially believe is the reason for the main character's problem? What revelations change our understanding of his motive? What do we ultimately learn has caused the problem? How does this help us clarify the nature of the problem? How does this challenge or reveal our own value systems?
7. RESOLVE THE CONFLICT: How is balance restored to the world of the play?

****A ten-minute play should have *one moment* when the character is forced to confront something that will change him or her.**

8. SPECTACLE: What is aurally or visually exotic, rhythmic, appealing in the play? The controlling idea of this script is a musical fugue. What is a fugue? (A piece of music which explores opposing ideas through different voices; the tension builds until there is a breakthrough and resolution.) In this play, the 'fugue' appears not only in the opening/closing passages, but in the entire text.

STRUCTURE OF A TEN-MINUTE PLAY (See [Haiku Deck online presentation.](#))

Many ten-minute plays include the following structural elements:

Page:	What:	How:
1	BURST OUT OF THE GATE!	Create compelling characters in conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Show the world we're in</i>• <i>Introduce central character</i>
1 to 2	GRAB & HOLD!	Clarify quest <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Reveal the dramatic question</i>
2 to 6	TWISTS & TURNS!	Complicate <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Introduce an unforeseen event?</i>• <i>Introduce a new character?</i>• <i>Character has a change of heart?</i>
7	SPRINT TO THE FINISH!	Resolve conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Answer the dramatic question</i>

10x10 INTENSIVE

Presentation of 10x10 Timeline, Submission Guidelines, changes from last year, and the application process for directors and actors, followed by Q&A.

Participants consulted with team leaders:

Marion Agnew re email newsletter and Facebook page

Sheena Albanese re playwright guidelines

Jelena Psenicnik re production (directors, actors, technicians)

Resources available on our website:

[Timeline](#), [Play Submission Guidelines](#), [Submission Form](#), [Script Format Sample](#), [Call for Directors](#), [Director Application](#)