



NEW WRITING
NORTH

YOUNG WRITERS



Creating 'Playable' Texts. Session One

Notes

Anything written in purple and italics – like this sentence – is a helpful hint, example or prompt to help if you're unsure or feeling stuck.

Take as long as you need or want to finish tasks. Be kind to yourself. Remember everything is a first draft / work in progress. It doesn't have to be perfect first time.

If you're really suffering from the dreaded writers' block forget about the task and just free write whatever is going on in your head for 2 minutes. Or read something, look up some artists on Instagram, play a game. Often when we're not thinking about writing is when we have our most creative thoughts. Giving your brain a rest is an important part of the process.

Introduction

What is a playable text?

A playable text is a story, play or poem that has the reader take on an active role when reading the text. This could be following instructions or making choices that affect how the story progresses.

Most playable texts are an experiment, finding different and fun ways to tell a story or have a reader interact with your writing.

Do It Theatre are a company exploring how performances can be experienced or performed by audience member. They call these experiences "Private Plays" - below is a quote from Do It about how their private play "Circles, Circles, Circles" worked.

"The Private Play itself was presented in a new way for us. There was no installation or exhibition. The script was contained in a zine and handed out in-between two cabaret acts and the audience read the script together as some ambient music played. The story looked at money and work in the context of mental health."

Do It Theatre's scripts often include instructions or stage directions for the readers. For example, they might encourage the reader to hide under a blanket or look at the sky as part of the text. This counts as a playable text because it directly involves the audience in an action to help tell the story or create atmosphere. The play happens through a mixture of reader's imagination and also what they're actually doing.

Get Inspired:

Unreliable Expert (10 mins)

Using randomwordgenerator.com, get an adjective and a noun;

for example I generated: Incompetent (adj) Mood (noun)

Now combine the two words to create natural phenomenon, scientific theory or species of animal. You are the world's leading expert who has discovered this thing. Write a short speech or Wikipedia article about your discovery.

for example: "Incompetent Mood is a psychological condition where the sufferer is convinced their emotions are worse in quality than everyone else." etc

Try to answer the following:

What exactly is it?

How did you discover it?

What impact & importance does it have in your field? (Medicine, Astrophysics, Wildlife in the Sahara Desert etc)

What's the wider impact and importance on the world?

If you're not sure what a word means – don't look it up! This is even better for this exercise. You are the expert so whatever meaning you give the word is factual, undisputable and categorically correct. No-one can question or contradict you. You are the world's leading expert in this!

A Task to do to before you write:

Read '[Circles, Circles, Circles](#)' a private play by Do It Theatre company. Originally performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2016.

Notice how the text is formatted. How is the setting is described to the audience?

Give it a Try:

Exercise One - Quick Write (5 mins)

Think of

A place you know well

A person who is special to you

An object you use every day

A memory that makes you happy

and

4 small actions (eg. scratching your ear, playing with your hair, checking your phone, smiling)

Write a short description for each; with as much detail as you can.

Exercise Two – Creating a World within a World

Part One – Free writing (15 mins)

Pick a spot that you can see from where you are. This can be inside or outside.

What are things that you see from that spot? Imagine that if you look at these things you can see hints of another world. (eg. There's a shiny surface where your reflection is always slightly behind)

Set a 10 minute timer on your phone. Start the timer and just WRITE. Don't stop. If you spell words wrong, don't go back to edit. If you lose track of an idea, don't worry just KEEP WRITING. Even if you have nothing on your mind, write I have nothing, or I don't know over and over again. If you get stuck keep writing the last word you put down. When the timer goes if STOP WRITING even if you're in the middle of sentence.

Read what you've written back slowly, and highlight in some way all of the ideas, words, sentences, repetitions that you like. Resist the temptation to start editing or delete / cross anything out.

Be as detailed and precise as you possibly can.

Notice the really obvious things but also the smaller things, that might be easy to miss.

Make it up! You're the expert here, if you start inventing things that you can't actually see; don't stop yourself writing.

Part Two – Redrafting (15 mins)

Using elements from both bits of writing you've already done, write a private play for someone who is special to you. Use the following structure:

PARAGRAPH ONE

Using the description of the place you know really well, set the scene.

PARAGRAPH TWO & THREE

"Here is where you'll find a world of that exists alongside our own. Not everyone can see it. This is a very special experience just for you."

Describe the magical world and how the player enters it. Try to use actions that the reader could do in real time while reading.

For example

(You go to the bottom of the stairs)

(You pick up a book)

(You get under the covers)

You can use the small actions you thought of earlier as inspiration

PARAGRAPH FOUR

Using your description of the person who is special to you, create a hero and introduce them to the story, either as the protagonist or another character.

What makes them special?

Maybe there is a small action they can do to prove they're in a magical world?

PARAGRAPH FIVE

Rewrite your description of an object you use every day as if it is magical important object.

PARAGRAPH SIX

Using your memory that makes you happy, write what happens to the player when they touch this magical item / what feelings do they get / it could be flash forward to your utopias/ dystopias and how it transports them back to our world.

Remember 15 minutes is just a suggested time to spend on this. You most likely won't finish in that time. Write as much as you want / can. Come back to it another day or work for a little longer if you get inspired.

If you finish the adventure, why not gift it to someone in your house to play? This works well if you've set the story within your own home or somewhere that it's safe to take your daily exercise.

This workshop was devised by JG for New Writing North Young Writers.



JG is a theatre-maker, dramaturg and 'not-quite-drag' artist. When riding solo, under the alias dandysopic; they make work that is gender-bent, unapologetically camp, heartfelt and unashamed. Most recently they wrote and performed a solo theatre performance; 'SPACE: A Herstory'; a co-commission by Curious Arts & Northern stage. Other recent credits include Creative Associate on Northern Stage's 'A Christmas Carol' and directing Zoë Murtagh's 'Iconography'. They also work as a freelance arts practitioner with Mortal Fools.

New Writing North Young Writers is a programme for young people aged 12-19. We run creative writing groups, masterclasses and programmes in schools across the North East. We support young people to express their ideas, to work with professional writers and artists, to create and share new work, and to meet other young writers.

We would love to read your writing! Share it with us on social media using #writingfromhome or by emailing youngwriters@newwritingnorth.com. Search for New Writing North Young Writers on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, where we will also be sharing regular writing prompts. Each week we will select a Young Writer of the Week whose work will be shared on our channels.

Find other writing workshops and much more on our website www.newwritingnorth.com

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