



2020 – Finegan Kruckemeyer Writing Workshop

Introduction

The following notes and prompts are from the Literacy in Action workshop, which was unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19. Finegan has kindly provided his notes for this workshop for Drama SA members.

The writing class was planned to be a journey through an age-old art form. An exercise in inventing the skeleton of a play.

The ideas will support teachers to engage students in writing as one, as some and as many, they will fashion landscapes and invent populations.

The prompts guide students to work from the macro to the micro, imagine worlds that hold countries, and countries that hold counties, and counties that hold mountains, and mountains that hold cities, and cities that hold citizens – a litany of citizens.

The process will ask them to make the final authorial leap, entering into the mind and heart of a protagonist, and writing about what they find.

Activity One:

Place and Character Study:

(NOTE: write with honesty. Even the fantastical needs a sense of truth and a tangible structure. If your story is lacking that connection an audience will disconnect.)

With a partner

Think, discuss and write about:

The Place

What are the stories of this place?

Three central buildings.

A place with a secret.

A place that is dangerous.

A place that lots of people gather in.

A place that was once in a fire.

A place named after someone famous – that famous person.

Three citizens.

What has never happened in this place?

What could happen in this place but hasn't yet?

Finegan Kruckemeyer is an Australian playwright with 81 commissioned plays performed on five continents and translated into six languages. Audiences have seen his work in over 100 international festivals.

Awards

- inaugural recipient of the Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship
- winner of the 2017 international Mickey Miner Lifetime Achievement Award for services to Theatre for Young Audiences
- winner of the 2015 David Williamson Award for Excellence in Australian Playwriting.

With your partner and a new piece of paper

Think, discuss and write about:

The Arrival

Someone unknown turns up here – how do they enter the place?

What do they wear?

What is striking about them?

What is something they carry with them (literally/ metaphorically) which gives a clue to their past? ie. A scar, anger when a certain name is mentioned, a child's bracelet.

How do they arrive?

Next:

- Pairs now swap **The Arrival** work of *The Character* who has arrived that they have completed with their partner with another pair.
- Each pair will now be looking in depth at a character who is unknown to them. The stranger is truly a stranger to them.
- Students, with their partner, then work with the new information to look in depth at the character.

The Character - Who is this person?

Give an explanation of the previous factors:

- *Why do they wear what they are wearing*
- *Why is what is striking about them striking*
- *Why do they carry what they are carrying*
- *Why do they arrive in the manner they do?*

Give them a connection to this place (precise or peripheral).

Give a sense of the journey they have been on.

Give a sense of their goal.

Give a sense of a powerful relationship.

Develop a Monologue:

Writing the monologue - is an individual task, with the partnerships splitting up. Students will each write something born from their shared imagining.

- Your character meets a character from the town and, in a setting you decide on and inspired by a reason of your choosing.
- Students will present a monologue about some aspect of their character's life. Their character will open up to this stranger (or do they somehow know them?)

Activity Two:

Working in small groups of six

Character Monologues

Students share their monologue from the previous exercise.
Discuss what is most interesting (both appealing and alarming) about the characters you have heard.

Society

For 10 minutes, talk about the interrelationships of this town.
How all these strangers may coexist (well or problematically) in this one place, their historical connections, their new relationships, their shared or clashing objectives.

NOTE: Listen to all ideas, appreciate all ideas, but go with the best ideas – strong art is about strong choices. But it is also about diplomacy – your ideas are not always the best ones. Celebrate this also.

Developing Dialogue

Working with a partner

Work with a partner to write a dialogue between your characters.

- Share with the class your community.

Activity Three:

Autobiography Study (solo work)

Memory Map

Students work by themselves to *create one memory map*.
Then find one point on map which involved a well-remembered, oft-repeated journey and move into...

Shift from Memoir, into True Fiction, into Magical Realism:

Describe a journey, writing what you pass as you pass it.

Stop – the last thing you just mentioned, you go back to it. You look at it closer, and you notice... what?

It reminds you of a moment in your past... what?

And suddenly you are back there, you are how old, you are doing what?

One sense takes precedence in your memory: 'your mouth is dry', or 'you hear the distant voices of your parents – they have never whispered so loudly' etc.

And now the magical realism – your memory tricks you and the impossible, something truly fantastical, happens: 'You fall backwards off the ladder and... forget to land', or 'She touched my arm and in that moment the grass curled around us, and every blade was a wedding ring, and every ring fit'.

Take this magical realist departure to a point of extreme: as you rise you near the sun, a crowd is gathering to celebrate your wedding and the walls of a church are slowly ballooning out, ever inflating...

And then... you are back at the place on your journey. You look at the thing that caught your attention, you compose yourself, you continue your initial journey. But something, within you or outside of you, has changed. What is it?

Activity Four:

Think about theatre as both a thing spoken and a thing shown.
(there needs to be a richness within both)

Read one of four monologues (teacher to select a variety of monologues which best suit their needs and class).

- *Students work with a partner.*
- *Discuss ways to show, to orate, to evoke.*
- *Decide what is spoken and what is not, what can be conveyed some other way.*
- *Discuss images or motifs that you could 'see' in the space which would replace the text itself.*
- *Rehearse.*
- *Present to the group.*

Now the opposite: respond to motifs/visuals/gesture/metaphor to write a monologue.

- *A piece of music (teacher to select).*
- *A row of trees stretching so far that the last one cannot be seen.*
- *At some point a ball rolls across the stage and the performer pauses and watches it.*
- *There is an analogy about some aspect of the seasons.*
- *There is a kiss (though it does not at all have to be a love story).*
- *A character, motif or moment from one of the other pieces heard tonight.*

- Rehearse.
- Share with the class.

Activity Five:

Warm-ups:

Five five-Minute Tasks (choose one and write quickly)

Write about the thing that your mother was always scared of. Write about never agains, maybes and ifs. But not yours: someone of another gender.

Write about height.

Write about last words at first light, or first words at last light.

Write about devils and write about ghosts. Write of the ones who have loved you the most.

Warm-ups:

Ernest Hemingway's 6-word story:
'For sale. Child's shoes. Never worn'.

Create your own.

The Empty Chairs: Build drama at each new stage. What are the most interesting escalations (not needing to be overly dramatic – they can be subtle) you can invent?

(Solo)

An empty chair. Someone sits. Are they waiting or landing? Comfortable or not? Surrounded or solitary?

A second chair and they are joined. Who is this? Were they expected? Is the mood of the scene tense or relaxed?

The new arrival says a sentence.

The first person responds or doesn't.

Something is dropped and breaks. How do the pair respond?

The second person resolves to leave. Do they leave together? Does the first person remain? Are things better or worse?

Time freezes and the first person's internal monologue is heard.

- Share with the class.

Four Characters:

(In fours)

Read the characters created in the previous exercise and, as a group, determine their befores and afters.

Choose three time periods (ie. the day before, their final birthday, the day when everything changed).

(Solo)

Write three short pieces – two from them, one from someone witnessing them.