

PLAYS



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There is a Powerpoint Presentation for these definitions.



PLAYS

Books and short stories tell a story using such elements as themes, characters, plots, and settings. Like these things, plays also tell a story. But a play is written to be performed. The author, the writer of a play, is called a **playwright**. The written form of a play is called a **script**.



ACTS AND SCENES

In a book, the story is divided into chapters. Plays are broken up into **acts** and **scenes**. The bigger divisions are called **acts**; the parts within an act are called **scenes**.

Plays can have any number of acts, and each act can have any number of scenes. However, most full length plays are written to be performed in about two hours, which includes an **intermission**, a short break for the actors and audience. An intermission gives an audience a chance to stretch their legs, and allows scenery and costume changes for the cast. When the setting (either the time or the place or both) changes, a new scene usually begins.

Plays can also be very short, only five minutes or so. Those plays are called "**skits**". A **skit** is often used to make a point or to introduce another activity. We often use skits to introduce a worship or vespers service.



An **act** is a group of two or more scenes that form a major division of a play. A **scene** is one part of the action, usually happening in a particular time and place.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

A playwright usually gives a list of characters, sometimes with their descriptions, at the beginning of the play. This **cast of characters** lists everyone in the play. Sometimes they are listed in the order they first appear; other times they are listed in the order of importance. A list of characters can be helpful for identification as you read the play.

A play may also include a **narrator**. A narrator speaks from the side and gives important information and insights, but is not part of the action.



A **cast of characters** is a list of who is in a play, and/or a short description of these characters.

DIALOGUE

Unlike books, a play mostly has conversation. It uses speaking parts to show what is happening in the story. This conversation is called **dialogue**. The character's name, sometimes called the "speech tag" helps you keep track of who is speaking. The conversation goes back and forth, and reveals the plot, themes, personalities, and often setting and time period.

In a novel, what the character is saying is set off by quote marks. These are not used in a written play.



Dialogue is the conversation between characters in a play.

PLOT

The **plot** is the action and main events in the play. As in any story, the plot of the play often revolves around a conflict.

There are five main types of conflict:

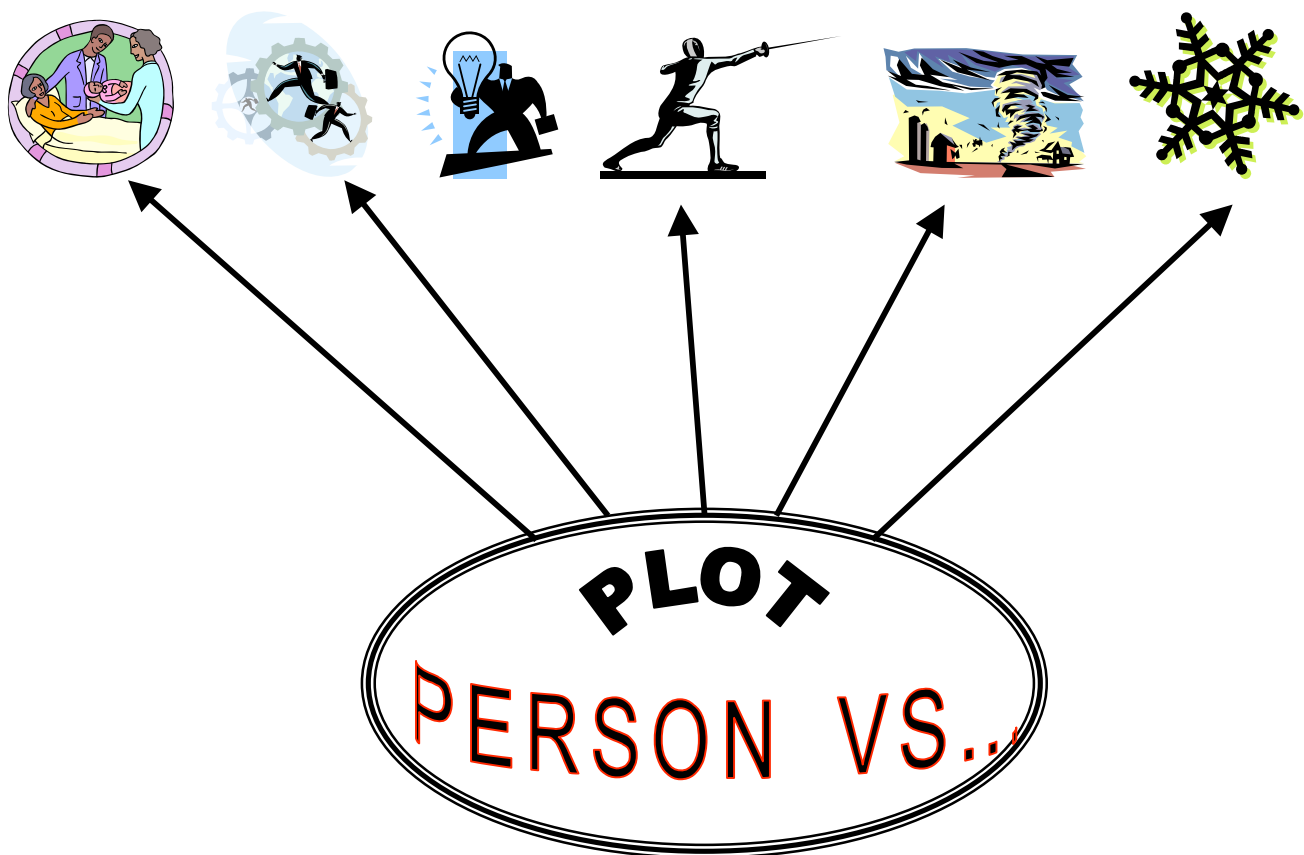
Person vs. Fate -- a problem that seems to be unsolvable or uncontrollable
Person vs. God or Satan -- a struggle or cooperation with God or Satan

Person vs. Nature -- a problem with some force of nature such as a tornado, snowstorm, or volcanic eruption

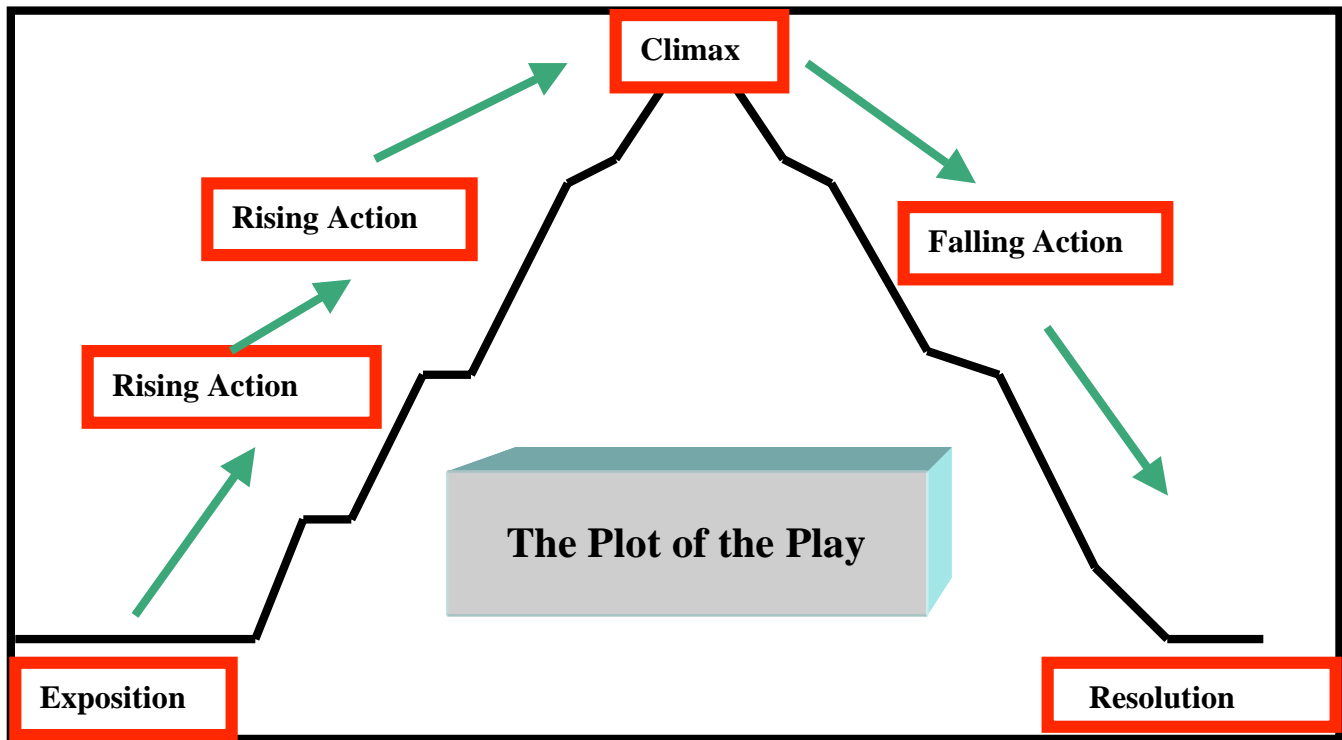
Person vs. Person -- a problem between two characters

Person vs. Society -- a problem with the laws or beliefs of a group

Person vs. Self -- a problem within a person when deciding what to think, believe, or do.



Plot Organization



Most plots follow a traditional organization. There is an **exposition** at the beginning, where the setting, characters, and conflict are introduced. As the conflict and suspense increase, there is **rising action**. A **climax** occurs when the conflict reaches a turning point or peak. Then the suspense lessens and there is **falling action**. Finally, the outcome of the story is decided, and there is **resolution**.



The **Plot** is the action or main events in a drama.

THEME

A play has a central idea or message that is called the theme. Sometimes a theme is very easy to find. The characters may state it directly. Other times, you must look for the “big idea”. A play might be about two brothers fighting each other in the Civil War, but the theme could be “family betrayal and its effects.” There may be other minor themes.



A statement about life around which a play is written is called a **theme**.

Here are some examples of themes:

Love is life’s greatest joy and greatest healer.

All is not what it seems.

Suffering can lead to growth in people.

Kindness can change animals and people for the better.

Hard work leads to success.

Money cannot buy happiness.

God rewards faithfulness.

Evil hurts the doer.

SETTING



The description of the **setting** of a play appears in the play immediately after the cast of characters. The setting refers to the place and time that a story happens. It may very generalized, like a setting “in a small town in the mid-west of America”. It may be very specific, taking place “in a room in the Holiday Inn in Rochester, NY”.

The setting may change from scene to scene or act to act.



The **Setting** is when and where the play takes place. The setting in a play is usually described in stage directions at the opening of the play or whenever it changes.

MONOLOGUE OR SOLILOQUY

Sometimes in a play a character will stand alone or to the side of the action and speak, but the speech is not directed to another character. Instead, it gives the audience a chance to see what the character is thinking. It allows the character to say something to the audience. This speech is called a **monologue** or **soliloquy**.

A character may turn to the audience to say something that the other characters that are on the stage are not supposed to hear. This is called an “**aside**.” It lets the audience in on part of the character’s thoughts and secrets.

An example of a famous soliloquy is this speech by Hamlet in the play *Hamlet* by [William Shakespeare](#):

HAMLET: To be, or not to be--that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep--
No more--and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep--
To sleep--perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. . . .



The **monologue** or **soliloquy** is a speech by one character who is alone on the stage or who speaks as if he is alone. This speaker is a character in the story. (A *narrator* gives insights and information from the side, but is not one of the characters in the action.)



PROPS



In order to show certain settings or actions, a play will need **props**. A prop is something that will help to further the action or setting. For example, a scene on a farm may have a pitchfork and bales of hay against a barn wall. A baseball scene may have a ball and bat.

Props do not have to be elaborate or expensive. A small table, lamp, and an old stuffed chair can be a living room. A few metal bars can show a jail.



STAGE DIRECTIONS

When you read a play, you must really use your imagination. If you go to the production of a play, you will be able to hear the characters talking, moving, and gesturing. You'll be able to see the props and the scenery. But when you are reading a play, you must use your imagination and the **stage directions**.

Stage directions tell the director of a play how it should look, what the setting should be, what props are needed, how the characters should dress and what they should do. They explain what actions the players should take, which way they should walk or talk.



Stage Directions describe how characters should move, act, and speak; they also give the details of the setting, and tell what props are needed.



SCRIPT

A **script** is the written play. Besides the elements of the play, a script may have special instructions or additional suggestions for the successful production of the play. It may give some biographical information about the author.

Scripts are usually printed showing a lot of white space. Performers and directors jot additional notes on the sides to help them interpret the play.

Usually the playwright has given ideas on how to put on the play. But often the actors will make changes to the characters. There are many different ways to say lines and make gestures. Try saying the following phrases in different ways and with different gestures:

“THERE is a rat on the desk.” (Sound commanding)

“THERE is a rat on the desk.” (Sound amazed)

“There is a RAT on the desk.” (Sound frightened)

“There is a RAT on the desk.” (Sound like this is funny)

Now find several ways to say this:

“There is a rat on the DESK.”

Name: _____ Date: _____ Assignment #1

Silently read the following short play. Underline one example of each of these elements of drama in the play. Clearly label them on the margin of the play.

title playwright

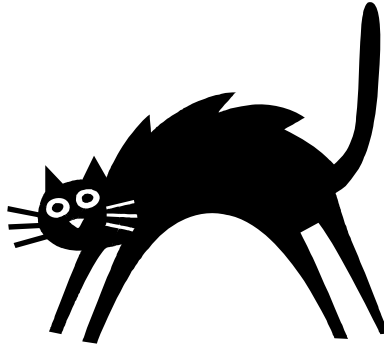
act scene cast of characters dialogue

monologue aside setting stage directions



Mother Knows Best

By Ida Snyder



CHARACTERS:

Charlie: a boy about 8 years old.

Mother: Charlie's mother

Susie: a girl about 10 years old, who is Charlie's sister

Baby Louise: a little girl about 2 years old.

Kitty: a character dressed like a cat.

SETTING:

A modern-day living room.

PROPS AND COSTUMES:

Kitty Cat -- a cat mask & tail & sweats

Baby -- bib, perhaps bonnet, a few baby toys, and two stuffed animals.

Charlie -- toy cars

Mother -- book and apron

Susie -- some sort of toys or books

Living room furniture -- couch, chairs, lamp & lampstand, rug

Backdrop -- walls & windows & pictures on the wall

Act One

Scene 1

The scene remains the same throughout the play: a modern living room, with a few chairs and a sofa, and some toys, including toy cars, scattered on the floor.

Charlie, Mother, Susie and Baby Louise should be dressed in modern clothes. Baby Louise should be dressed in something to indicate her age; perhaps she has a bib on and has several stuffed animals.

Kitty should be dressed like a cat, with ears, tail, and whiskers.

(The curtain rises on a living room scene. Mother is sitting on a chair with a book open. Baby Louise is sitting on the floor, happily playing with her toys. Charlie is playing with a toy car, making car noises. Susie is sitting on another chair. The cat is curled up on the floor.)

Mother (sighs, and closes her book): I suppose I must be starting supper soon. Susie, will you watch Baby Louise and see that she doesn't put anything into her mouth?

(Baby Louise chuckles and makes her stuffed animals talk to each other.)

Susie: Of course Mom! But I won't have to change her, will I?

Mother (*laughing*): No, I'll be right out here in the kitchen for any emergencies.

(Charlie is still softly making car noises. He runs his car over Kitty's back. Kitty arches his back and meows.)

Kitty (*Kitty sounds angry and hurt.*): Mee-oowww!

Mother: (*in a scolding tone*) Charlie! I've told you before, don't run your cars over the cat! If he gets hurt and angry, he will bite or scratch you!

Charlie: (*with a sigh*) Okay, Mom.

(Kitty circles a few times and curls up on the floor again. Mother leaves the room. Charlie watches her go out. Then he gives a little smile, and begins to move his cars over the rug again, getting closer and closer to Kitty.)

Susie (*walks to the side of the room and talks to audience*): He's going to get hurt! He never believes that Mom knows best.)



Scene 2

(Baby continues to coo and play with the stuffed animals. Charlie runs his car over the cat's tail.)

Kitty *(loudly and with anger)*: MEE – OOWW! *(Kitty moves to another location.)*

Susie *(in a know-it-all voice)*: Mom told you not to hurt Kitty!

Baby Louise *(in a tiny baby voice)*: Not 'urt Kitty.

Charlie: You're not my boss! Anyhow, Kitty likes it! *(He continues to make car noises. Slowly he gets closer to the cat again. Finally, he runs the car over the cat again.)*

Kitty *(This time Kitty sounds angrier.)*: RRRR—OWL....Mee—oww! *(Kitty moves again.)*

Susie *(loud and bossy)*: Stop hurting Kitty! Stop being mean!

Baby Louise *(banging on floor or end table)*: Mean, mean, mean!

Charlie: *(mad)* Let me alone! Kitty likes to play with me!

(Charlie takes his car and moves closer to the cat. Then slowly, slowly, with an eye on his sister, he moves to Kitty and runs the car roughly on him.)

Kitty: *(Kitty claws and spits at Charlie)* RRRR, MEEE-OOWWW, RRRRRRRR

Charlie: *(yelling)* Ow! Ow! You bad cat! Kitty scratched me!

Baby Louise: Bad cat.

Susie: *(smugly)* Serves you right. Come here, Kitty. *(Kitty comes over to Susie. Susie pets her.)* Nice Kitty, did that mean Charlie hurt you?

Baby Louise: 'urt oo ?

Susie: *(smug and know-it-all)* See, Charlie, Mom does know best!

The End



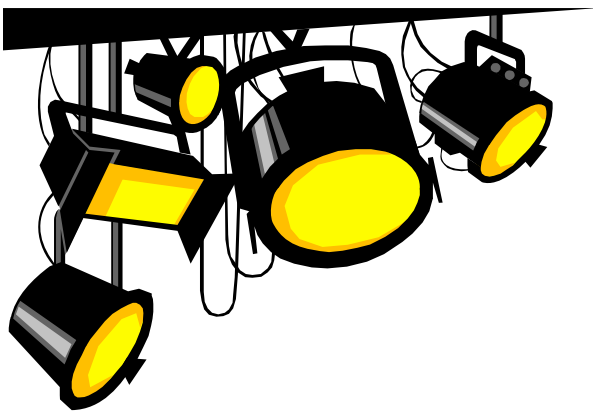
Form a group of five, assign parts, and read the play aloud. Trade parts; read it aloud again. Discuss how the different actors made the part different.

Then, with the group, go back over the play and pencil in additional stage directions that you think would make the play clearer.

What is the theme of this story?

What is the plot of this story?

How did you identify the stage directions? _____





Assignment #3 *Note to Teachers:*

Read aloud Acts 27:5-44 and Acts 28:1-10. It is important that this be read from a modern translation of the Bible and not from a story book.

The over-all goal is to write a short, two-act play based on a Bible story.

Divide the class into partners. Read Acts 27:5-44 and Acts 28:1-10 aloud to the group.

Students will write short plays based on the scriptures above.

A good way to evaluate these is to choose several to perform in a Reader's Theater each morning for worship. It is really amazing how different students will find different approaches and insights into this story.

Students: Do Assignment Sheet #3.

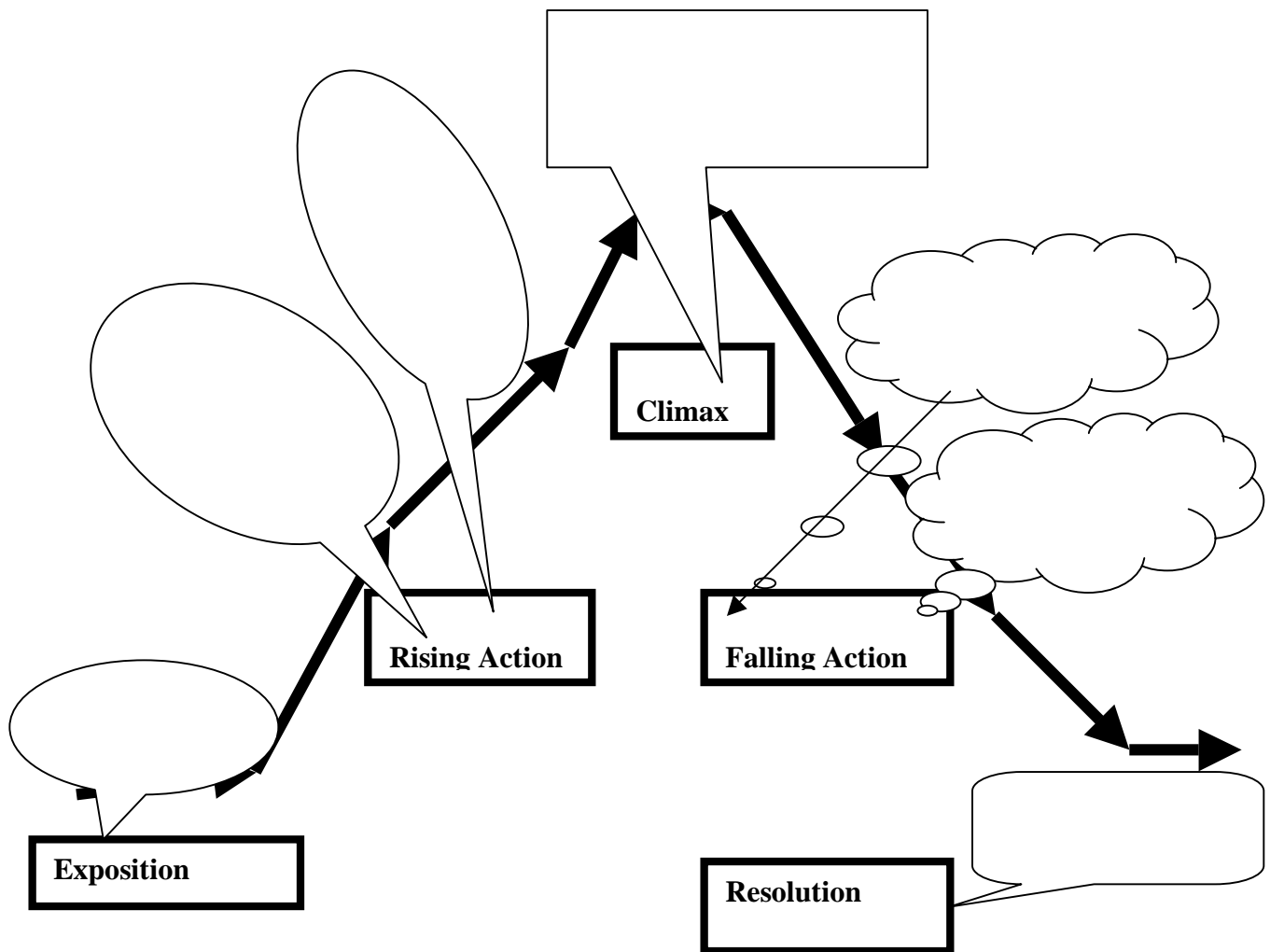
Name: _____ Date: _____ Assignment Sheet #3

Our overall goal is to write a short, two-act play based on our passages in Acts, and to perform it for an audience.

Find a partner and review the story in Acts.
Work together and share ideas and answers.
Each of you should hand in a separate sheet.

Your partner's name: _____ Scripture: _____

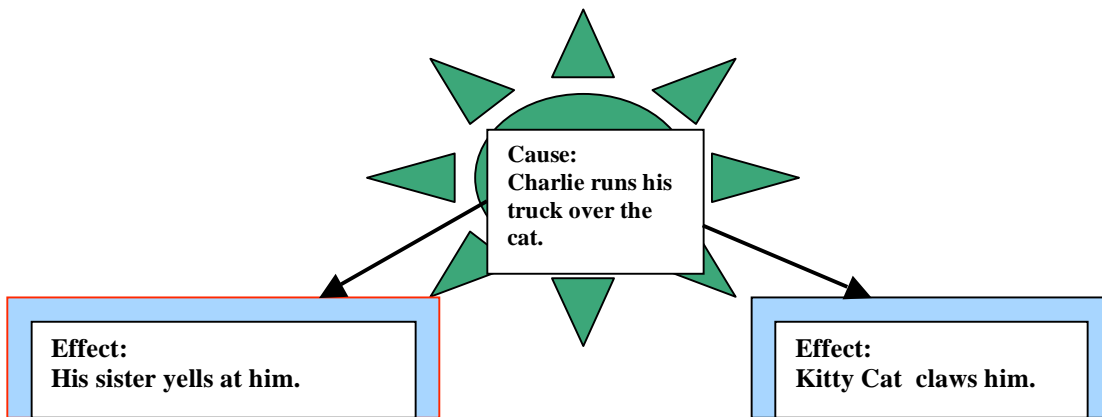
Fill in the plot chart. (You may add balloons if you wish)



Name: _____ Date: _____ Assignment #4

Cause/Effect

In the play "Mother Knows Best" you will find this cause and effect:



Your section of Scripture: _____

Look at your section of Scripture and find 2 cause/effect relationships.
Make your own graphic organizers.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Assignment #5

Pre-Writing: Developing Your Characters

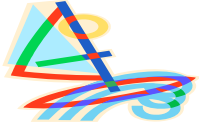
Your Scripture: _____



What characters will you have in your play? In this Bible story, you know there have to be other people who are not named, such as sailors, guards, and islanders. Sometimes there are too many people. It is okay to drop unimportant people or to have non-speaking roles.

As you give names to your characters and think about costumes, remember the time period. Roman names often ended with “us” such as Julius and Marcus.

Character:	Short description of character:



Name: _____ Date: _____ Assignment #6

Pre-Writing: Developing the Plot, Theme, and Setting

Your Scripture: _____

1. What is the main problem faced by these characters?

2. Things they do to solve this problem (action)

3. What is the setting of this play? Include the time period.

4. What will be the resolution of these problems (the end)? Or don't things work out?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Assignment #7

Scripture portion: _____

Pre-writing: Backdrops

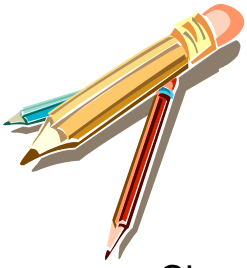
Get together with your partner. Talk about what you imagine seeing in the background in the play. Your ideas do not have to match.

On another sheet sketch your ideas for a backdrop for this play. Use colored pencils.

A backdrop is a large area behind the characters. It can be very simple and plain, or quite elaborate. Often it is painted on canvas or light wood and made so that it can be easily moved out of the way or covered for another scene.

You may use more than one sheet of paper.





Name: _____ Date: _____ Assignment #8

Scripture portion: _____

Pre-writing: Begin your play.

Choose one person to be the scribe. You may work on the computer, or on paper for the first rough draft. However, the final manuscript must be typed.

Work together and begin to write dialogue. As you go along, you may begin to put in stage directions or suggestions, and you might find that you need to add or subtract characters. But remember, this is a Bible story, so try to stay true to the text.

This means you will not add a character that is an “action hero” like Superman, but you may make up realistic dialogue for a sailor, such as “We are going to sink!”

REMEMBER, IN A PLAY, DIALOGUE LOOKS LIKE THIS:

Marcus (scared and trembling): We are sinking! Throw off the cargo!
Titus (sternly): We may have to kill the prisoners so they don’t escape.

IT DOES NOT LOOK LIKE THIS:

“We are sinking! Throw off the cargo!” Marcus shouted trembling.
“We may have to kill the prisoners so they don’t escape,” Titus commanded sternly.

After you have finished, trade plays with another group. Read each other’s plays and then make suggestions or notes. Revise where necessary.

Now, type your final draft. Make sure you save the file. Then print it and hand it in.



Name: _____ Date: _____ Assignment #9

Putting On Your Play

Now you have typed your play!

Count the characters in your play. How many copies of the play will you need to put on the play? _____

Find students to play the characters. Get them to help you do a read-through.

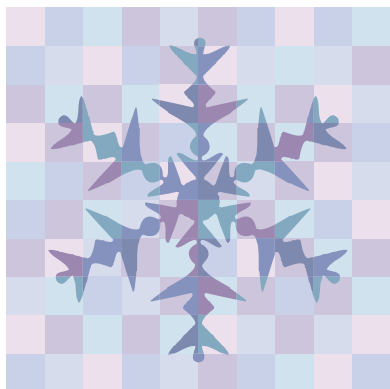
After the read-through, what suggestions do you have to improve your play?

What things did you like about your play?



THE BOSTON BOYS

*A play from an old reader
(Anonymous)*



The Boston Boys

A Play Anonymous



[At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, a British army, under General Howe, occupied the city of Boston. The people were obliged to endure many insults from the rude and overbearing soldiers. Their houses were pillaged, their shops and stores were plundered, and their churches were profaned. Even the boys in their sports were sometimes cruelly annoyed by the British soldiers.]

A famous story is told of some boys who appealed to General Howe himself for protection against some soldiers who had trampled down their snow hills and broken u the ice where they were accustomed to skate. The general listened to their story and was so struck with their courage and sturdy patriotism that he gave orders to prevent all future annoyances of the kind.]

Cast of Characters:

George: a boy about 12-14 who is the leader of the boys

James: a boy about 12-14 who is George's friend

William: a boy about 12-14, another friend

Boys: four or five other boys, about 8-14

Sentinel: a British soldier (a redcoat)

General Howe: leader of the British soldiers (the redcoats)

Props: ice skates, fife, drums, pine-tree flag, rifle and swords for sentinel and General, wig

Costumes: Boys should wear knee breeches and buckles on their shoes, and wear 3-cornered hats. Sentinel should dress like a "redcoat" with a sword, and hold a rifle over his shoulder. General should wear a colonial wig, lots of gold braid, and a sword.



Act I

[The play takes place in Boston, Massachusetts slightly after the Revolutionary War has begun.]

Scene I. The skating pond in Boston Common. Enter several boys with their skates. They discover that the ice has been broken up.



George: Here it is again, boys. The ice has been broken by those redcoats just as it was last week and the week before.

William: Well, our fun is all spoiled for today. We may as well go home.

James: I wish I was a man. If I were big enough, I'd shoulder our old musket and go and join General Washington.

William: So would I; and I would never give up till every redcoat was driven out of the land.

George: Well, I've made up my mind. If I am only a boy, still I'm not going to bear this treatment any longer.

All: Hurrah! Hurrah!

James: How are you going to help yourself, George? The redcoats are a good deal stronger than we are.

George: I'll tell you what we can do. Let us all form in line of march and go right up to the general's headquarters, and tell him about it. I'll march in front, and carry the flag, and James may beat the drum.

William: Yes, and I'll play the fife.

George: And I'll tell General Howe that we won't be annoyed by British soldiers, or any other soldiers.

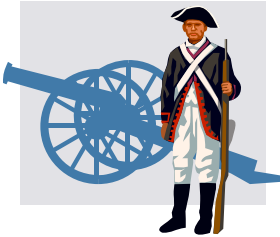
All: Hurrah! Hurrah! That's right, George; and we'll stand by you. (Then they toss up their hats and make the air ring with hurrahs.) Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

George: Well, fall in line, boys. Here we go to beard the British lion in his den.

(They march away to the sound of the drum.)



Scene II—[General Howe's headquarters. A sentinel pacing before the door, with a gun over his shoulder. Noise of drum and fife in the distance.]



Sentinel. Now, what in the world does that mean? That's no music of ours, I'm sure. Well! Well! Well! Sure as I live, it's a hundred boys coming right this way, and keeping step, too! And what kind of flag is that? It isn't the British flag, sure. There's a pine tree painted on it—and the word "LIBERTY." Well! Well! The whole country is full of rebellion. Even the children are rank rebels.

[The boys halt in front of the door, and George approaches the Sentinel.]

George: Is General Howe at home?

Sentinel: Who are you?

George: We are Boston boys, sir.

Sentinel: I see. What do you want here with your drum and your rebel flag?

George: We want our just rights, sir. We wish to speak to the British general.

Sentinel: Ah, indeed! The British general has better business than listening to a lot of dirty little rebels. You had better move on. I'll not bother him with any of your nonsense.

George: Very well, sir. But we'll wait right here till we see General Howe. We WILL see him; and he SHALL do us justice.

All the Boys: That's so! Hurrah! Hurrah!

Sentinel: The kind of justice you need, you little rascals, is to be whipped and sent home to your mothers. What are you making all this fuss about, anyhow?

James: Well, you know the pond down there in the Common?

Sentinel: The mud hole, you mean! Yes; I've seen it. I hear that the ice is not very good today.

George: Yes. Some of your brave redcoats have broken it up just to annoy us boys.



Sentinel: Served you right, served you right, you little cowards! Now move along!

All the Boys: Don't call us cowards! We won't move a step till we see the general.

[The door opens and General Howe steps out.]



General: What, what, what! What is all this about? Where did these boys come from?

George: We are Boston boys, General Howe, and we have come to you to ask for justice.

General: You shall have it, my boys; you shall have it! Tell me, what is the matter?

George: It's all on account of your soldiers, General Howe. They trample down our snow houses, they break our sleds, they steal our balls, they do everything they can to annoy us. This morning they have broken the ice on our skating pond.

General: And what are you going to do about it?

George: Do about it! Why sir, we have come to protest against such unjust treatment. We appeal to you for justice; and we declare that we cannot and will not endure such things any longer.

General [aside]: Do you hear that? These boys are like their fathers, determined to have liberty. Liberty is in the very air of this country, and it is useless to try to fight against it.

George: We appeal to you, General Howe.

General: You shall have justice, my brave boys. The soldier who again interferes with your sports in any way, or who annoys you, shall be severely punished. You have my word for it, and I will see that this rule is enforced. Does that satisfy you?

George: Oh, yes, General Howe! And we all thank you very much.

General: Never mind about the thanks. You are brave boys, all of you—real English boys.

All the boys: No sir! We are AMERICAN boys. Hurrah for Liberty! Thank you, General Howe. Good-bye!

[The drum strikes up and the boys march off with flying colors.]

Project Sunlight by June Strong

Project Sunlight is a small, book-length play that deals with the end of time. In it, an angel randomly picks a human to follow in depth. The subject human, whom the angel names "Sunlight," gradually, after a painful divorce, comes to know and follow Jesus. Characters in the play are confronted with the claims of Christ as time comes to an end.

This is a great play for a Reader's Theater, and students are exposed to theology without any pain. A reading of it is well worth the effort and can produce many discussions.



Resources

***Project Sunlight* by June Strong. Edited by Gerald Wheeler. Southern Publishing Association, 1980.**

***Writers Express: A Handbook for Young Writers, Thinkers, and Learners*, WRITE SOURCE, Great Source Education Group, by DC Heath, a division of Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1995.**

***Write Source 2000: A Guide to Writing, Thinking, and Learning*, by Great Source Education Group, Inc., Houghton Mifflin Company, Wilmington, MA 01887, 1999.**

<http://www.lazybeescripts.co.uk/> Has scripts for plays for purchase. Plays may be viewed, though, for play elements.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/> Excellent drama site—try the 60 second Shakespeare tab.

,
<http://www.cyberbee.com/> This site will help you with primary research.

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/drama.html> Web English teacher, drama resources.

<http://eprentice.sdsu.edu/F044/jhoffman/Presentation1.ppt#256>

