

The following are brainstorming ideas, prompts, and writing tips from Playhouse on the Square and AATE to help give you some ideas if you're lost. Please see the additional **Formatting** and **Play Slam!** guides for more information.

### **Middle School Division Theme:**

"Take a Stand"

### **High School Division Theme:**

"The World Today"

## **Theme**

### **Brainstorming: "Take a Stand"**

- Make a list of things that you would stand up for:
  - Examples: A friend, a stranger, your family, animals, the environment, etc.
- Make a list of things that people around you stand up for:
  - Examples: Neighbors, community, beliefs, religion, politics, etc.
- Make a list of things that people from around the world stand up for:
  - Examples: Rights, religion, borders, laws, freedom, etc.

### **Brainstorming: "The World Today"**

- How is your life different today than it was yesterday?
- Compare your life now to that when you were a child
- How has your community, state, or country physically transformed over the decades or centuries?
- How has a community across the world transformed over decades or centuries?
- What big events have transformed you, your community, your country, or the world?

### **Write It Out:** Now do some short writing to explore some of the following questions:

- What are the things that I would stand up for?
- What might stop you from standing up?
- What could you tell someone else who is afraid of standing up?
- What people have been transformed by big events in the world?
- What will tomorrow look like?
- What causes people or communities to change?
- What would happen if you were placed in a different community or time period?

### **Going Deeper:**

- What might your central character discover that changes what they understand about who they are, who they used to be, or who they may become?
  - How might that character make that discovery?
  - Is the discovery pleasant, painful, or both?
- What might the central character discover about another person or group of people that helps the character understand them, forgive them, help them, or work together with them?
  - What could motivate the character to make that discovery, or avoid making that discovery?
- Young people often discover that taking a stand is a very difficult thing.

- What could cause them to finally stand up?
- How does standing up change them?
- Comparing the present to the past could mean that something has changed for better or worse.
  - Are the characters better off today or in the past?
  - How have they changed or evolved?

## Setting

**Brainstorming:** Where is your play set?

- Locations:
  - School, Home, Bedroom, Park, Jungle, Island, Planet, Imaginary World, etc.
    - Your play can be set anywhere!
  - Think About:
    - Is it local to your community?
    - Is it a place you are familiar with?
    - Is it a city far away?
    - Is it a brand new country?
    - Is it an unknown place?
- Time:
  - Day time or Night time
  - Does it span 10-minutes, or an hour, or one day, or much longer?
  - Is it set in the past, present, or future?
- Season/Weather:
  - Does the play take place Indoors or Outdoors?
  - Is it hot, freezing, or a mild temperature?
  - What time of year is it?
  - Think About:
    - Does the weather have an effect on your characters or not?

**Brainstorming:** How does location affect a character revealing a truth?

- Where would be a comfortable location to have a truth discovered?
  - Does your character want to be in a familiar place?
- Where would be a surprising or uncomfortable location to have a truth discovered?
  - Would your character learn something if a truth is revealed in an unknown location?

## Characters

**Brainstorming:** Who is this story about?

- Who is your central character?
  - They don't have to speak the most, but the story is focused on them.
  - Two or more characters can be the central focus as well.
  - Is it a group story?
  - What do they want?
- Who are the other characters needed to tell your story?
  - How does each character feel about one another?
  - What are they afraid of?
  - How do they feel about themselves?
  - Do any characters have interesting thoughts, feelings or reactions to situations?
  - Are they unpredictable?
  - Are there any characters not seen onstage?
    - Friends, family, or enemies they talk about
- Do any characters change over the course of your play?
- **Remember:** You are limited to 6 characters

**Write it Out:** Character Backstory

- Character “Portrait”
  - Make a list of words that describe your central character (be specific)
- A Day in the Life
  - Write about your central character’s:
    - Worst day
    - Favorite song
    - Biggest fear
    - Most treasured possession
    - Person they most admire
    - A question they want to ask another character

## Plot

**Brainstorming:** What is the story of your play?

- What happens to your characters over the course of your play?
- Is there a beginning, middle, and end to your story?
  - Is the show in chronological order or a mixture of the order?
- What is the central conflict or event of your play?
  - Does this event change, grow, or transform your characters?
  - Is there a problem that your central character tries to solve or has to learn from?
  - Who or what prevents your central character from solving the problem or getting what they want?
  - If the characters do not end up “happily ever after,” does the discovery the character makes change their life in a small or large way?
  - Does the discovery make a difference for any other characters?

## Tips

- Outline your story or plot before you start writing your script
- Try telling the story of your play to a friend or family member
  - Repeat this a couple of different times so you get the feel for the important events of your story
- Create a storyboard with text and/or images, or even some kind of map.
  - Use drawings, symbols, or doodles to represent events, characters, etc.
- Try putting key scenes on separate sheet of paper and lay them out in different orders to experiment with the sequence of events.

## What happens if I get stuck?

- Don’t give up. All writers get stuck; even your favorite playwright or author has gotten stuck during the writing process.
- Go back and read aloud what you have written so far. Sometimes reading out loud can give you fresh perspectives or new ideas!
- Stuck on a particular scene or detail? Skip ahead or go back! Sometimes the order of your plot or sequence of events in your play is not the order in which you write your script.
- Find a friend or family member to read your work and give you some feedback.
- Take a break! Get up from the computer, take a stretch break, eat a snack, take a walk, or just do something else for a little while. Then come back to your script with fresh eyes.