



Heal the Divide on Campus

A Protest Plays Project Initiative

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Brief Description

Protest Plays Project and Little Black Dress INK invite college/university students to write short plays or monologues (1-10 minutes in length) inspired by the communities in which they live. Plays might explore issues pertaining specifically to each playwright's city, or a national/global issue seen through each playwright's community/city lens (as it pertains to/manifests in their city). The key is *to get local*—we want to see what is happening where you live!

Selected plays will be read on a special ONSTAGE: ON-AIR podcast in Fall 2020, and made available to colleges wishing to participate in a creative story exchange by presenting readings on their campus. Past participating campuses include Iowa State University, University of Texas at Arlington, Columbus State University, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Wake Forest University.

Goals

- To increase opportunities for constructive dialogue around/about issues facing us today through theatrical conversation.
- To offer students the opportunity to give voice to issues facing them/their communities.
- To create a forum in which those ideas are not only shared with the community being written about, but with audiences living in other geographies/communities as well.
- To foster connectivity and increased empathy between communities
- To engage in inter-collegiate conversation with one another about the processes and outcomes of the Heal the Divide on Campus project in order to support further growth/development of this and other initiatives like it.



Timeline

Plays will be accepted through May 1, 2020. Faculty and guest artists will read plays over the summer, with selected playwrights notified by Aug 10, 2020.

Additional Information

*While Protest Plays Project also engages in political theatre, our **HEAL THE DIVIDE project is non-partisan**. Your play does not have to be political in nature to qualify for this project—it just needs to live in the city/community you call home. Selected plays will offer a diverse array of perspectives from a wide range of communities—not only geographically but socio-politically as well. **All voices are welcome, and encouraged!***



Playwrights can upload their work at www.ProtestPlaysProject.org

Writing Prompts for Classrooms/Workshops

There are so many excellent ways to encourage students to write about current events impacting their community – what follows are just a few jumping off points, and I wholeheartedly encourage you to make these your own as you cater them to your campus.

The Big Eye

I start this exercise by inviting students to find a comfortable space to sit with their notebooks. Whether we're in a theatre, a dance studio, at a park, etc – I want them to be comfortable, because I'm going to be asking them to do sensory work. Every step of this is guided by the facilitator, and at no point am I asking students to answer my questions aloud – instead, I instruct them to consider each question an opportunity for internal reflections as they progress through each step. The group will remain silent for the most of this exercise.

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1. Invite students to close their eyes and sit quietly with their own body for a few minutes. Check in with their toes, with the blood pumping through their veins... pay attention to any sensations they may have been overlooking (the sun on their skin, the concrete beneath their body, the air conditioning blowing onto their necks, etc.)
 2. After a few minutes of this, invite them to let go of the things they can feel, and instead focus in on the things they can hear. The sounds of the room you're all in, the breath of their peers, the sounds of the park, etc.
 3. Invite them to allow the things they hear to paint pictures in their mind's eye... can they play with perspective? Can they "see" what they are hearing from above, from behind, or from far away? Where are they in these pictures? Are they in the center? To the side? In the distance? Or non-existent?
 4. After a few moments feeling and listening to this room (or immediate area if you're outside), invite the students to extend their hearing to what's happening outside this building/immediate area... What can they hear/see if they "zoom out" past the immediately accessible? Allow these new sounds/sights to take shape in their mind's eye...
 5. Next, invite them to zoom out to incorporate the whole college campus. They're high above the action... Who do they see? What can they hear? Zoom out again... What stories are taking place on the streets surrounding your school?
 6. Continue to zoom out even more, working in stages until they are hovering over the whole city. Let them "float" there for a while, listening, and observing.
 7. Next, let them know that there is one voice below rising up to them over the din. Ask them to find that one voice and zoom in on it until they are standing/sitting next to this person. Invite them to sit with this person for a while, to walk with them, to listen to them... To witness them.

You can end the exercise here, by asking them to invite this person back into the room with them, and allow them to transcribe this person's story, OR, you can do some more physical work with them depending on time/their level of interest...

8. After a few minutes, invite them to "bring this person" back into the room with them. Ask them to stretch as this person would stretch, to get up and walk the room as this person would, to find the places in this person's body where stress, toil, fear, love, and hope all live.
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9. Place a chair in the center of the room and give each person the opportunity to use the chair as a soapbox for their character. Tell them that the person they brought back with them has something important to share in one word... invite them to use that chair to share this one word.
 10. After everyone has shared their word, invite them to sit down with their notebooks and write this person's story. It can be a monologue, it can be a scene, it can be a list of feelings/thoughts/phrases... They are transcribing what they hear coming from this person whom they just "met".
 11. You may want to offer sharing time to allow students to read some of what they have written. You will definitely want to allow for some discussion time to assess the exercise, and allow for feedback. The work begun during this exercise can be workshopped/revised or used as brainstorming material for a later piece.

Newspaper Games

There are so many newspaper writing prompts to choose from! Here are two that have worked well for me:

A - Headline Grab

1. Cut out/print out headlines/stories from the local newspapers, fold them up and put them into a bag.
2. Print out a list of genres, cut them up and put into another bag.
3. Invite students to draw one item from each bag
4. Students are then tasked with turning the newspaper article/headline into a short play in the style of the genre drawn.

B- Newspaper Black-Out

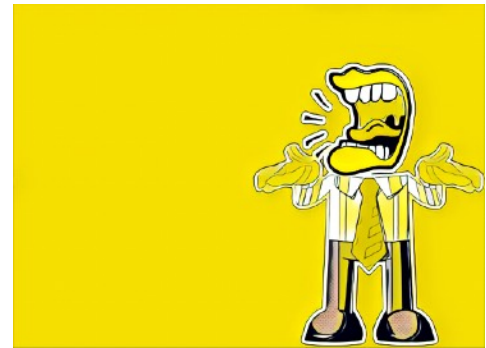
1. Students bring in news articles they want to work with or are curious about.
 2. Ask students to begin blacking out unnecessary text in the article - this will take several passes. The goal is to boil the article down to 5-7 key words. At the end of the exercise, the article will be mostly blacked out, with only the most vital words still visible. These words are now the student's touchstone for writing a play.
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3. Use the remaining words as: a title, words that must be incorporated into dialogue, or as the play's theme... etc.

Soundbites

This one can be really cool, or really weird... but it always leads to interesting discussion and some unique work. *Soundbites does require quite a bit of prep time and some technical know-how on your part*

1. Collect snippets of audio from news stories – these should be short (no longer than 10-15 seconds) – and should contain a good assortment of stories (try to collect a mix of moods/tones/events so that you're offering a broad spectrum)
2. Invite students to sit in a comfortable place in the room with their notebook and a pen/pencil.
3. The exercise begins with the facilitator playing a soundbite, and then allowing for 2-3 minutes writing time after each. The playwrights are asked to freewrite for those 2-3 minutes, avoiding over-thinking their writing. They may be inspired to write reactions, their feelings, they may want to describe a scene, a mood, a character, or they may jump right into dialogue/a monologue inspired by the clip – there's no right/wrong way for them to write/respond to each clip.
4. Each playwright is then encouraged to choose one or more of their reaction pieces to develop into a short play/monologue/performative text.



Musical Moods

This is a very easy, fun exercise to work with.

1. Put together a varied playlist of instrumental music. *It's important to avoid songs with any lyrics for this exercise*
 2. Invite students to choose a local issue/theme to work with. Have them write the theme/issue at the top of a blank sheet of paper (they will probably need a few sheets for this - I always encourage them to just write in their notebooks) This may look like "Poverty on campus" or "LGBTQ issues within my city", etc.
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3. Inform the students that they should focus on their topic over the next several minutes while you play different music. Their job is to let the music inspire pictures/moods/characters/scenarios/etc. and to just write down whatever the music helps them hear/see/smell/imagine. They should not self-critique or edit, they will have limited time to write, and there is no wrong way to do this exercise.
 4. Play approximately 1 minute of each song. Do not create breaks within the playlist - just switch to the next song after 1 minute.
 5. 10 songs is a good number to start with. That translates to roughly 10 minutes of writing time.
 6. Afterwards, talk with the students about the exercise. Ask them what discoveries they made/insights or ideas they had.
 7. Students now have inspiration for 10 plays/monologues. Encourage them to look to these snippets as a means of dramatizing their chosen theme/message.

Additional Links/Resources:

The following articles provide excellent - and current - discussion material for artists and students alike. Inviting students to read some of the following, before they begin writing for this project, will provide conversation starters for anyone still unsure of how they want to wade into writing about today's issues in their community.

- [How to Have Better Political Discussions - TED Talk](https://www.ted.com/talks/robb_willer_how_to_have_better_political_conversations)
(https://www.ted.com/talks/robb_willer_how_to_have_better_political_conversations)
 - [Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds \(The New Yorker\)](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds)
(<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds>)
 - [A psychologist explains the limits of human compassion \(VOX\)](https://www.vox.com/explainers/2017/7/19/15925506/psychic-numbing-paul-slovic-apathy)
(<https://www.vox.com/explainers/2017/7/19/15925506/psychic-numbing-paul-slovic-apathy>)
 - [And Nevertheless, She Persisted: Finding My Way Through an Existential Crisis \(THE LARK\)](http://www.larktheatre.org/blog/and-nevertheless-she-persisted-finding-my-way-through-existential-crisis/)
(<http://www.larktheatre.org/blog/and-nevertheless-she-persisted-finding-my-way-through-existential-crisis/>)
 - [What Science Tells Us About Good and Evil \(National Geographic\)](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/08/science-good-evil-charlottesville/)
(<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/08/science-good-evil-charlottesville/>)
 - ["Why Do You Have to Make Everything Political?" \(Bitter Gertrude\)](https://bittergertrude.com/2017/08/04/why-do-you-have-to-make-everything-political/)
(<https://bittergertrude.com/2017/08/04/why-do-you-have-to-make-everything-political/>)
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- [Radical Empathy Is the Theatre Artist's New Job](http://howlround.com/radical-empathy-is-the-theatre-artist-s-new-job) (HowlRound)
(<http://howlround.com/radical-empathy-is-the-theatre-artist-s-new-job>)
 - [“The Play’s the Thing”: Is Theatre our Ideal Empathy Workout?](http://howlround.com/the-play-s-the-thing-is-theatre-our-ideal-empathy-workout) (HowlRound)
(<http://howlround.com/the-play-s-the-thing-is-theatre-our-ideal-empathy-workout>)
 - [Liberal Lessons in Taking Back America](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/education/edlife/harvard-resistance-school-liberal-lessons-take-back-america.html?mcubz=0&_r=0) (NY Times)
(https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/education/edlife/harvard-resistance-school-liberal-lessons-take-back-america.html?mcubz=0&_r=0)



Please don't hesitate to contact us with your own suggested resources/ideas! Our hope is that this project will inspire collaboration from all sides, and we'd love to continue making new resources/ideas available to participating schools!

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