

## **Breathing Life into Literature: A Teacher’s Guide to Playwriting in the Classroom**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Suspicion, prejudice, and bias are the themes of this unit on playwriting. While studying the art of playwriting, students will discover how the aforementioned issues in extreme forms can result in social oppression. By examining the science fiction teleplay, “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street,” students will realize that the concept of monsters is a symbol for the paranoia, fears, and ignorance of average Americans post- World War II. For instance, during the 1950s when the aforementioned teleplay was set, the nation was brewing with racial conflict during The Civil Rights Movement. This theme of treating people as individuals also applies to people from different social and economic classes as well as from different geographical locations, political parties, and religions.

This unit is written for 7<sup>th</sup> grade courses in English and Reading. However, the lessons are adaptable for 6<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Our school’s diversity is a reflection of the cultural dynamics of the neighboring community. There is a healthy blend of both Hispanic (51%) and Black (47%) students. Yet our population of Caucasian students is only 1%, and the numbers of Asians and Native American students are less than 1% each. Many of our children are at-risk students because 89% of our students qualify for free/reduced lunch. We are a Title I, Magnet Arts middle school with a population of nearly 2,000 students; therefore, our class size averages around 30 students, which are 10 students above the state average. Our student body is comprised of gifted/talented (3%), Pre-AP, special education (14%) students, and regular education students (“Dowling Middle School”).

### **OBJECTIVES**

This unit satisfies HISD TAKS Objectives in both reading and English. The student will:

- Connect, compare and contrast ideas, themes and issues across text (7.11)(D)
- Analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, relationships, and changes they undergo (7.12)(F)
- Recognize and analyze plot, setting, problem resolution and other literary elements (7.12)(G)
- Write to express, develop, reflect on ideas and to problem solve (7.15)(A)
- Write to entertain such as to compose essays, stories or plays (7.15)(D)
- Select and use voice and style appropriate to audience and purpose (7.15)(E)
- Revise selected drafts by adding, elaborating, deleting, combining and rearranging text (7.18)(C)
- Proofread his/her own writing and that of others (7.18)(H)

## **RATIONALE**

Growing up, my father repeatedly told me stories of an English teacher who taught him Shakespeare when he attended high school. The teacher performed a monologue from a character from Old English Literature. Due to her graphic display of teaching, her students successfully remembered the characters and dialogue of each story better because the teacher breathed life into literature. Consequently, my father relished reading and passed down his love of all genres of writing to me. As teachers, we want to encourage a passion for reading. Creating memorable and dynamic characters through writing achieves the aforementioned objective.

Great literature did not die with the brilliant playwright Shakespeare. Every time that a play is read or performed with insightful interpretation, students are breathing life into literature. Teaching students how to exhume literature from the black and white pages by reading, writing, and performing plays makes literature become real and alive. Writing plays and performing dialogue is an effective strategy for transferring a visual image from the pages of text to a live medium. Students will simultaneously learn the skills of playwriting via exploration of the literary elements of characterization, conflict, dialogue, plot, and theme. Exploring the depth of various terms associated with characterization, such as protagonist, antagonist, and motivation, will strengthen their interest in reading and their ability to analyze many genres of texts. Not to mention when writing essays, short stories, or plays, they will create more vivid and believable characters that will jump off the page and onto the stage when orated.

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

### ***The Twilight Zone* & Series Creator**

Rod Serling was “one of the most prolific writers in the history of” television (“Rod Serling”). He created *The Twilight Zone* series (1959-1964) which was a weekly fantasy-based anthology. This series allowed him to examine controversial issues and provided a platform for him to make social commentary (“Rod Serling”). “Frequent themes include nuclear war, mass hysteria, and McCarthyism, subjects that were strictly forbidden” for prime-time television during the 1960s (“The Twilight Zone”). Serling brilliantly disguised his examination of social and political issues behind the screen of science fiction, fantasy, and the supernatural (Applebee 431). In the following quote from the teleplay “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street,” Serling comments on the dangers of prejudice. He predicts that searching for scapegoats for societies’ problems will damage future generations:

The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs and explosions and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, and prejudices—to be found only in the minds of men. For the record, prejudices can kill and suspicion can destroy. A thoughtless, frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all its own for the children... and the children yet unborn . . . and the pity of it is . . . that these things cannot be confined to... *The Twilight Zone!* (Serling 228)

Serling’s foreboding voice narrated the moral lesson of each episode (“The Twilight Zone”). For five seasons, he and the writers explored such issues as “racism, cold war paranoia, and the psychological horrors of war” (“Rod Serling”). Due to his military career, he was plagued with “nightmares and flashbacks for the rest of his life” (“Rod Serling”). Therefore, many episodes were influenced by his personal experience (“Rod Serling”). His life is a prime example of using traumatic experiences as a positive outlet for creative expression such as script writing.

### **Social Context**

When examining the theme of “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street,” it is important to discuss the historical context of this teleplay. This teleplay teaches a relevant lesson because

oftentimes students make assumptions about peers based on their group, club, or clique. Students will benefit from reading this teleplay each year because they will realize the importance of getting to know people before using them as a scapegoat for what is going wrong in their own personal lives. In Lesson Two of the Concept Development section, students will reflect on a time when they have been prejudged. Then, students will connect their personal experience with that of characters in the teleplay. Examining the harmful effects of prejudice will help them critically understand the themes of suspicion, prejudice, and bias. Therefore, knowledge of the following historical events will help students understand in deeper detail the social context of this teleplay.

### ***Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s)***

The Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s-1960s is an example of how suspicion, prejudice, and bias can have both tragic social and political consequences. In Lessons One and Two students will have the opportunity to explore the aforementioned themes in the science fiction play by Rod Serling and in this author's dramatic scene entitled "The Key Suspect." The following events and people still influence the way people view race relations in post-World War II America.

#### ***Brown v. Board of Education (1954)***

In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States declared that segregated schools were unconstitutional (Ling 28). In other words, separating students based on the color of their skin and providing unequal facilities is illegal. The Court's ruling was also a "moral judgment" which declared "that racial segregation in public schools was wrong" (Dudziak 390). Chief Justice Warren partially based his ruling in *Brown* on social science evidence that "racial segregation was harmful to children" (Dudziak 390). Despite the Court's decree, ten years later "fewer than one-half of 1 percent of black children in the South attended public schools with white children" (Hansen 1). Because of the diversity that is now present in many inner-city schools, it is often hard for students to believe that such conditions once existed. Conversely, critics will argue that predominantly minority schools are still inherently unequal.

#### ***Emmett Till (1955)***

This fourteen-year-old boy was visiting from Chicago during the summer of 1955 when white men cruelly abducted and killed him (Ling 37). Tragically, his "body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River" located in Money, Mississippi (Stanton 149). His mother requested that he have an open-casket funeral; thereby, allowing the world to see the pulverized face of her black son (Ling 37). That year there was a public outcry, yet the all white, southern jury refused to convict the accused (who confessed years later to a journalist) (Ling 37). Unfortunately, the "grisly mutilation of Till . . . was used . . . to terrorize Negro citizens . . ." (Washington 92). The "ultimate responsibility for this and other tragic events must rest with the American people themselves. It rests with all of us, black and white, who call ourselves civilized men" (Washington 92).

#### ***Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)***

On August 28, 1963, Dr. King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech at a "political rally of the nation's citizens at the Lincoln Memorial" in Washington, DC. (Hansen 100). That March on Washington is one of the most famous rallies in American history. King eloquently preached, "I have a dream . . . that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character (Hansen 131). Despite the poor treatment of ethnic minorities in this country, King and many others still dreamed of the day that "black men and white men . . . will be able to join hands" (Hansen 133). The overreactions of the characters of the subsequent teleplay are consistent with the intolerant behavior of many

people who lived in the 1950s and 1960s. In Lesson Two, students will contemplate his transcendent words.

### **“The Monsters are Due on Maple Street”**

The following paragraphs are plot summaries of each Act I and II in this teleplay. Teachers can use the following summaries from this unit’s teleplay as detailed examples of plot summaries. Students will write a brief plot summary for their own dramatic scenes in Lesson Three. Next, they will need to consider the historical context of their dramatic scene when composing themes, which will be included in their summaries.

#### ***Plot Summary Act I***

This episode was set in the suburbs on a commonly named street called Maple (Serling 207). During one afternoon, the neighbors hear a roar and see a bright light while engaging in summer activities (Serling 207). Some neighbors believe that a meteor causes the disturbance (Serling 207). Much to their dismay, the neighbors realize that their power is not working on the stove, the phone is dead, the radio is not working and the ignitions of everyone’s cars will not ignite (Serling 208-210). Peter Van Horn suggests that he will “cut through the backyard to see if the power’s still on, on Floral Street” (Serling 209). Tommy suggests that he not go because the aliens “don’t want us to leave. That’s why they shut everything off” (Serling 212). He then creates suspicion when he says that the only people who can leave town are “the people they sent down ahead of them. They looked just like humans” (Serling 213). Upon hearing this story most of the neighbors do not believe him, but they begin to suspect Les Goodman, due to his perceived idiosyncratic behavior, such as his car starting by itself (Serling 215). As far as the neighborhood is concerned, he is a “real oddball” (Serling 214). One neighbor accuses him of staring at the stars at night like he is waiting for something to happen (Serling 218).

#### ***Plot Summary Act II***

There is candlelight coming from various houses, but no electricity (Serling 219). Next, the neighbors begin to suspect Steve Brand because he stays up late working at night on his ham radio set (Serling 221). Aggressively, the neighbors charge toward Steve’s house (Serling 222). They demand to see his radio until Tommy starts to scream, “It’s the monster! It’s the monster” (Serling 223). Everyone sees the figure in the darkness (Serling 223). Don Martin carries a gun (Serling 223). Steve grabs it out of his hand, and Charlie snatches the shotgun from Steve (Serling 223). Ultimately, Charlie shoots the dark figure in the shadow, which turns out to be their neighbor Pete Van Horn (Serling 223). The neighbors begin to accuse each other when the lights go on and off in each of their houses (Serling 227). In Lesson One of the Assessment section, the students will analyze how the neighbors transform from decent, ordinary, suburban folks to suspicious, vicious and violent people.

#### ***Resolution***

In Lesson Four students will write their own dramatic scenes. This section is a summary of the resolution of this unit’s teleplay. Even if the characters are figuratively in the dark, the audience should understand the resolution of their scene. “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street” has a powerful ending because the audience discovers that the aliens are responsible for turning the lights out in the community (Serling 227-228). Yet the characters are both literally and figuratively in the dark about what is actually happening in their community. Placing communities who are dependent on technology in darkness is the tool that the aliens use to conquer (Serling 228). The audience sees that the aliens do not need to land on earth or drop bombs to get the people to destroy each other (Serling 228). “Their world is full of Maple Streets. And we’ll go from one to the other and let them destroy themselves” (Serling 228). This ending is

an example of a twist ending used by the writers to create an environment where the unexpected becomes the reality (“Twist Ending”).

## **The Stages of Playwriting and Performance**

### ***Leadership Roles***

There will be four major roles in each assigned writing group: director, writer, actors, and stage manager. Each group will be comprised of four or five members. By creating a vital role for each student, children will have ownership in creating their own dramatic scene or play. Although the teacher is the ultimate director, each small group should have an assistant director. Students are team members and should work together despite differences (Peterson and O’Connor 127). Prior to asking them to write their scenes in Lesson Four, teachers should explain to the students “the process of putting on a show and shepherding them [throughout]” the process (Peterson and O’Connor 127). Even though teachers will be monitoring and moving from group to group, student directors will serve as team leaders of the project. The student director should watch the actors from his group and scrutinize their performance during rehearsals. The director should make sure that the dialogue and actions reflect the themes of the scene authentically.

As the teachers, we want to encourage the students to write their own scenes or research libraries, bookstores, community Parks & Recreation agencies, or monthly drama magazines for play ideas (Peterson and O’Connor 86). According to Lisa Cobb, author of *Literary Ideas and Scripts for Young Playwrights*, fairy tales, variations of fairy tales, story joke plays, historical and cultural myth plays are also options (iii-iv). In addition, based on the cast size a teacher may choose to adapt a scene or play from a book, biography, poem, story, article, or even a cartoon strip from the newspaper (Peterson and O’Connor 90). However, if students choose to write their own original scenes, they should convey the answer to the 5Ws (who, what, when, where, why) and demonstrate how this story will be conveyed on stage in their scripts (Peterson and O’Connor 93). Finally, writers should try to entertain the audience by writing characters that the audience can identify with or idealize (Grote 33). Audience members also enjoy seeing the underdog triumph or characters that they find attractive in some way (Grote 33).

In Lesson Four, students will decide among themselves who their actors will be unless the teacher feels that she will have time for auditions. The director should remind the actors during rehearsals that they should turn their bodies as much as possible to the audience when they are speaking, even if they are addressing another character directly to their right or left (Peterson and O’Connor 73). One solution is to have actors “both face the audience and one stand upstage of the other’s shoulder, talking in effect to the back of the other person’s head” (Grote 99). The reason is the audience will see and hear the performances in the scene better (Peterson and O’Connor 73). Actors need to convey the activities of their character on stage and remember their characters goals (Grote 27). The characters’ actions in the scene cause conflict, which moves the plot forward (Grote 162). Remember stage action “reveals characters’ objectives, relationships, and moods” (Sossaman 54). These actions on stage help the audience understand the scene and “what the character does, and how he or she does it will express the emotion of any given moment” (Grote 162).

The stage manager has an important job even though the audience will not see this person. They will actually play two roles: stagehand and set designer, since these are small productions. They will be responsible for set decorations and props (Sossaman 53, 54). Prior to show time, the stage manager should be helping the director, writers, and actors with prop ideas that will convey the moral of the scene effectively. They should make sure that the props are on stage before the performance begins and assist actors with make-up or costume changes backstage (Grote 151). The director should not involve herself in this process (Grote 151).

## *Playwriting*

When students write their dramatic scenes, they need to write in scriptwriting format (see Appendix). They will need to decide on a theme that will teach a lesson without preaching. Then they should create characters that will achieve their goals despite conflict. The answers to the 5Ws and how will often cross over, interlock, overlap, or depend on each other” (Peterson and O’Connor 29). When answering the question who, students should think about the characteristics of a certain type of person, the actions they would be involved in, and their dialogue should reflect the feelings reflected in their actions. The characters should interact with each other based on their relationship to one another (Peterson and O’Connor 134). For example, the way that students would greet their best friend might differ depending on if they are speaking to their parent, teacher, or pastor of their church. When creating character sketches, the student writers should think about what the character says and how the character looks, acts, thinks, and feels. Students may use an autobiographical or biographical method to create characters. In the autobiographical method, the student will concoct a character that is like them (Novakovich 52). Using the biographical method students will write a character that they have observed or know in real life (Novakovich 53). Finally, students will find answers to the 5Ws by observing the people they know and their environment (Peterson and O’Connor 50).

When writing and preparing for the scene, students need to think of an appropriate setting. They should contemplate their scene’s theme. Where is the action of this play most likely to take place? Students should think of place and ask themselves several pertinent questions. They should use their five senses to answer the following questions. What does the climate feel like? What scent is strongest in the air? What sounds are present? Is there anything to eat or drink (Peterson and O’Connor 47)? Students should be thinking about the theme of their scene and when would this story most likely take place. What does the character expect to happen in the near future (Peterson and O’Connor 49)? The characters’ actions and dialogue should give clues to when the story is taking place. “Out of a place, a character is formed; out of a character’s motives, plot may follow” (Novakovich 28). In other words, without the places and actions affecting the character, there will be no connection between events (Novakovich 28).

Hence, make a clear decision about what the character will be doing in the scene (Peterson and O’Connor 40). The actions of the characters should fit within the context of the themes in the scene. It is impossible to develop a dramatic conflict without having some idea of what issues the scene dramatizes (Grote 32). Characters should respond to the actions and the conflicts presented in the play. Obstacles should obstruct the protagonists’ path as they struggle to pursue their objective (Sossaman 49). Without conflict and complications, their scene will not create interest in the audience (Sossaman 49). For example, if a child is escaping a lynch mob, he may act as if his heart is pounding as he climbs up to a roof to escape the danger surrounding his home (Peterson 31 and O’Connor). Every scene should have an antagonist that is working against the motivations or desires of the hero of the story. Nevertheless, students must remember that by the end of their dramatic scene or play, the conflict must be resolved (Sossaman 52). The answers to how an actor performs an action are often included in the answers to what actions the character will perform (Peterson and O’Connor 29). How a character performs can be anyone onstage telling his story with body and voice reflected in his actions (Peterson and O’Connor 40). Students should ask themselves based on the character’s social and economic background, how does he/she speak? Whether they have a dialect is indicative of their environment.

As students write the dialogue for the characters in their lessons, they should know why a character is trying to achieve something. The character’s desire to achieve a specific goal is termed a motivation. This knowledge will drive the scene, causing the action to move forward until something is accomplished or actions are impeded (Peterson and O’Connor 50). Understanding characters’ values based on their age, economic status, racial heritage, and religion

may provide a motivation for their actions. Ultimately, students should connect playwriting to their own personal experience (Peterson and O'Connor 50). Knowledge of their characters' backgrounds will help them connect to the audience. Teachers should ask students to explore a reason for their characters' choices and explanations for their hopes for in life (Peterson and O'Connor 52).

### ***Revising & Editing***

According to Sossaman, dialogue has numerous functions. When students revise and edit their work they should check to see if the dialogue advances the plot, reveals character, reveals a character's mood, reveals characters' relationships to each other, provides exposition, foreshadows events, provides humor and contributes toward theme (Sossaman 59-61). As students evaluate their scenes they should analyze the major characters, the plot, dialogue, theme, setting, and other literary elements. Students should read their scenes for another group or for the teacher. Once students do a run-through of their scenes, they will learn a lot from listeners' questions and suggestions (Sossaman 102). When other students review the scenes, the writer should listen without defending herself or explaining her intentions (Sossaman 93). Even though only one student is acting as the scribe, all students should contribute to the development of the scene or play.

### ***Set Production (props, lighting, sounds, & economics)***

Due to time and economic constraints, the teacher can collaborate with the art teacher and theater arts teacher for set ideas or artistic work for background and other prop ideas. Students can use materials from home with parental permission to enhance the look of their characters. Performances of scenes may occur in the classroom or stage depending on teacher preference. Most students will be so excited about performing that they will not trouble themselves with these limitations. Never underestimate the creative power of children, because they will come up with ideas and work hard to make the deadline (Peterson and O'Connor 109). In fact, these restrictions might cause students to become more creative when trying to perform their characters' dialogue. Large productions will need scenic, lighting, and sound designers, props, and costumes (Peterson and O'Connor 109). However, in smaller shows, teachers should keep the project small (Peterson and O'Connor 109). Ultimately, time, money and people are the resources that determine the size of the production. Teachers should remember the old adage "necessity is the mother of invention."

### ***Rehearsals***

Students should do a run-through of the dialogue before show time. The purpose of rehearsal is to identify any holes in their scenes (Peterson and O'Connor 152). This is the time when actors learn their lines and practice their performance (Grote 123). Students should not hold their scripts in their hands or in their pockets when they rehearse because this creates a crutch (Grote 138). They should answer the pertinent questions to the 5Ws (Peterson and O'Connor 115). If students realize the script does not answer the aforementioned questions when reading the play aloud, they need to go back and briefly revise and edit the script to answer these vital questions.

During rehearsals, the stagehand and director should help actors with their entrances, exits, crossings from one side of the stage to another (Peterson and O'Connor 128). Monitor that the actors' actions are consistent with their dialogue and the theme of the play. In addition, actors should wear any accessories or costume modifications to detect any potential problems for the play (Peterson and O'Connor 157).

### ***Show Time***

Teachers will assess students' performances based on plot development, the flow of the story, character development, dialogue, and stage props (Cobb 173). Despite the evaluation process, we as teachers should encourage students to have fun throughout this unit. This project may instill a passion for literature that reaches beyond the boundaries of our classrooms.

Along this journey, some students will discover talents within themselves that they never knew existed. Reading and writing will never be the same, as students will realize the power of words to convey a message and influence another person's life. Alas, by show time they will be bringing playwriting to life through their engaging performances.

### **LESSON PLANS**

This unit will take approximately one week. Teachers should extend time to two weeks based on the learning needs of their students.

#### **Modifications**

Shorten assignments for special needs students, extend time or allow them to complete work in partners. GT/Pre-AP students should be able to complete assessments in a shorter time than regular education students should. In addition, advanced students should be working at an accelerated pace. These modifications are applicable to every lesson in this unit.

#### **Lesson One: The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street**

##### ***Objectives***

Students will learn how diction and dialogue overlap to reveal a character's motivations and relationships with other characters. HISD TAKS Objective (7.12)(F)

##### ***Introduction***

Teachers will define or review the following terms on the board or overhead before you begin this lesson: antagonist, bias, diction, dialogue, censorship, character, characterization, foil, idiosyncrasy, motivation, prejudice, protagonist, scapegoat, suspicion, science fiction, and theme.

Students will read "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street" in order to analyze how a play's dialogue reveals characterization and other relevant terms. Finally, they will discuss how the themes of bias, prejudice, and suspicion reveal themselves through each character's actions and dialogue in this dramatic teleplay.

##### ***Concept Development***

###### **Prereading Strategies**

1. Teachers will ask students if they have heard of or seen the popular dramatic television series entitled the *The Twilight Zone*. Students will read the background of the shows creator Rod Serling and explain to students how Rod Serling used his show to deal with important social issues of the 1950s.
2. Teachers should discuss the Social Context (Civil Rights Movement 1950s-1960s) of the teleplay.
3. Explain why Rod Serling used Science Fiction as a way to avoid censorship in the American era of blacklisting.
4. Have students complete "Connect to Your Life" and "Key to the Drama" in the *Interactive Reader* (204) prior to reading the teleplay. This will aid students in understanding the moblike mentality, which develops in the teleplay. Therefore, the theme of "prejudices can



kill and suspicion can destroy,” will have relevance during the discussion of the play (204, 228).

### ***Student Practice***

#### *The Interactive Reader*

1. The “Focus” sections begin by recommending to students that they should underline or circle important details that relate to characterization or theme.
2. Following each section the “Pause and Reflect” questions asks students to answer questions about characterization, plot and or theme of the play.
3. Students should analyze one of the following quotes spoken by Steve.  
STEVE: Wait a minute... wait a minute! Let’s not be a mob! (216)  
STEVE: Let’s pick out every idiosyncrasy of every single man, woman, and child on the street. (221).  
STEVE: You’re standing here all set to crucify—all set to find a scapegoat (222).
4. What does Steve’s choice of diction reveal about his character and the behavior of the other characters in this teleplay? What does this dialogue reveal about the theme of this teleplay?

### ***Assessment***

Model Lesson Unit 5, B8/ *Language of Literature*, “Think Critically” (Applebee 429)

Variation of the essay mini quiz from the aforementioned sources:

1. Who are the real monsters on Maple Street?
2. What causes ordinary people to become vicious and use other people as scapegoats?
3. How can a person’s thoughts be as powerful as a weapon?
4. Describe the transformation of the characters from the beginning of the teleplay to the finale of the teleplay.
5. Note: Students should use text evidence such as quotations from the story to answer questions.

### ***Closure***

Next class they will read a brief dramatic scene, “The Key Suspect,” which can be found in the Appendix section of this unit.

### ***Resources***

*Interactive Reader* or *Language of Literature*; Internet Resources; Model Lesson Unit 5

## **Lesson Two: “The Key Suspect”**

### ***Objectives***

Students will compare, contrast, and connect the themes across texts. HISD TAKS Objective (7.11)(D). Students will analyze characters to understand traits, motivations, relationships and conflicts HISD TAKS Objective (7.12)(F).

### ***Introduction***

Teachers will review the meaning of terms such as alienation, bias, characterization, motivation, prejudice, scapegoat suspicion and trait.

Students will read a short dramatic scene by this author entitled the “The Key Suspect.” They will use this play to compare and contrast the themes of bias, prejudice and suspicion with the play “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street.” Students should observe how bias, idiosyncrasy,

prejudice, and suspicion could exist between minorities, people of different socio-economic classes and people of diverse educational backgrounds.

### ***Concept Development***

#### **Prereading Strategies**

1. Students will connect relevant themes to their own lives by thinking of a time that someone prejudged them because of the clothes they were wearing, the people they were hanging around, or some other superficial criteria.
2. Teachers should ask students to explain how the experience made them feel.
3. Students will consider what it means to judge someone by the “content of their character” and not by “the color of their skin” (Hansen 131).
4. Post the block quote from the teleplay “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street.” (See Unit Background: Twilight Zone & Series Creator) How is prejudicial attitudes passed down from generation to generation, in humanity’s search for a scapegoat?

### ***Student Practice***

#### **“The Key Suspect”**

1. Students will read “The Key Suspect” or another short dramatic scene by their teacher or some other source that contains the same themes of suspicion, prejudice and bias.
2. Students will discuss the character traits of Shaniqua (student) and Mrs. Diaz-Jones (teacher).
3. Then students should discuss the conflict between the student and the teacher in the play. Were there any other types of conflicts present other than person vs. person?
4. Have students to analyze in partners one of the following quotes and explain how the themes and conflicts of the play reveal themselves in the characters’ dialogue.

SHANIQUA: You think because my momma doesn’t drive a Mercedes-Benz like you that means you’re better than me.

SHANIQUA: You can’t judge a book by its cover. Maybe there is more to a person than meets the eye.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES: Thanks Shaniqua you gave me back the keys to my life . . . .

### ***Assessment***

#### **“The Key Suspect”**

1. Why do you think that Shaniqua was suspicious of Mrs. Diaz-Jones?
2. Do you think that there was evidence of prejudice or bias between the characters?
3. Evaluate the conflict of this story and discuss that the conflict reveals the relationship between these two characters.
4. Predict how the resolution of the scene would have been different if Mrs. Diaz-Jones had openly accused Shaniqua of taking the keys or spoken to the student aggressively.
5. Do you think that Shaniqua would have returned the keys if she had not realized that she prejudged and misjudged Mrs. Diaz-Jones?

### ***Closure***

Tell students that the next class they will learn the stages of playwriting and use the “The Key Suspect” as a model for writing their own dramatic scenes.

## ***Resources***

“The Key Suspect” (See Appendix), *Interactive Reader/ Language of Literature, The Dream Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Speech that Inspired a Nation*

## **Lesson Three: Analyzing and Brainstorming When Playwriting**

### ***Objectives***

Students will write to express ideas. HISD TAKS Objective (7.15)(A). Students will also entertain the class, teacher and other audience members. HISD TAKS Objective (7.15)(D).

### ***Introduction***

Teachers and students review the elements of plot. The scene they are writing should reveal the setting and information about the characters. A well-written scene should have conflict and theme as revealed by the dialogue and actions of their play.

This lesson will challenge students to dissect the elements of a story into small parts in order to brainstorm and eventually create their own dramatic scenes.

### ***Concept Development***

1. Students will write a plot summary of “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street” or “The Key Suspect.” This five-sentence plot summary should include the setting, names of main characters, the main conflict, the theme, and the resolution of either play.
2. This activity will help students when preparing a storyboard for their lesson on playwriting.
3. Teachers will discuss with students how they will create a storyboard for their own scene after they engage in some brainstorming exercise.
4. Teachers will model various activities on the overhead before each student practice so that students will be comfortable expressing their ideas. Diagrams are a helpful tool.

### ***Student Practice***

1. Students will compare and contrast a character from “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street” with a character from “The Key Suspect” using a Venn diagram.
2. Teachers should ask students to think of their favorite character from a television show or movie.
3. Students will eventually create a character sketch for a character from their imagination. How does the character act, speak, think, and feel?
4. Students should list three issues that are important to them. For example, school violence, uniforms, or racism. Then explain in 1-2 sentences why those issues are important. Students will be using one of those issues for their dramatic scene.
5. Students will determine which type of conflict their character would thrive in best. For example, person versus person, person versus self, person versus society, etc.

### ***Assessment***

1. Be specific about where you want your dramatic scene to take place. For example, the classroom, hallway, gym class, etc.
2. List three character traits of a character from your imagination.
3. Write down three sentences on how your character would handle confrontation by one issue that is important to you.
4. Create three statements that your character would make when confronted by conflict.

### ***Closure***

Teachers will tell students to use their knowledge of playwriting and the prewriting techniques from their assessment for the next lesson.

### ***Resources***

“The Key Suspect” (See Appendix), *Language of Literature* (Glossary of Literary and Reading Terms R6-R21)

## **Lesson Four: Writing Your Own Dramatic Scene or Play**

### ***Objectives***

Students will use their voice to entertain and write an age-appropriate scene or play. HISD TAKS Objectives (7.15)(D) & (7.15)(E).

### ***Introduction***

Teachers will discuss the function and purpose of roles (director, writer, actors, and stage manager) in each group. Students will be working as a team and should collaborate on their ideas for the script. Next, teachers will discuss the stages of playwriting.

By the end of this lesson, students will have written at least one draft of a scene or play that they will perform for the class. Students should review the copy of “The Key Suspect” for a dramatic scene or play format.

### ***Concept Development***

Students will take out of their folders the following materials from Lesson Three: storyboard, character sketch, the three issues that are important to them, and three statements their character would make when presented with conflict.

### ***Student Practice***

1. Students will break into groups of four or five children based on alphabetical order, ability, or other criteria.
2. Students will discuss what roles (director, writer, actor, and stage manager) they are prepared to accept.
3. Then, students will bring their notes from the following day into the discussion. They should compare themes, character notes, setting, and potential conflicting situations.
4. Finally, students need to consider what type of conflict their main character will encounter.
5. Students should talk out the dialogue as they write for cohesion and flow purposes.

### ***Assessment***

1. Students should complete a workable draft by the end of the class period. This is not impossible if the teacher is walking around and allowing her students to brainstorm with her during the class session.
2. Drafts should have two to three main characters. There should be an apparent conflict between the protagonist and antagonist. The dialogue and actions in the play should reflect a theme. Finally, there should be an apparent resolution of the conflict.

### ***Resources***

“The Key Suspect,” *Fiction’s Writer’s Workshop*, *Language of Literature* (R6-R21)

### ***Closure***

Teachers will remind students that they will be revising, editing and rehearsing their scenes or plays during the next class.

### **Lesson Five: Dramatic Scenes (Performance)**

#### ***Objectives***

Students will revise selected drafts and proofread plays by others. HISD TAKS Objectives (7.18)(C) & (7.18)(H).

#### ***Introduction***

Review the following terms: director, scriptwriter, actors, stage manager, set decorator & props, active listener and audience etiquette. The purpose of this lesson is for students to proofread their scenes, revise and edit, rehearse and perform their scenes for an assessment.

#### ***Concept Development***

1. Teachers will remind students that their scenes should be answering the 5Ws and how. Every play should have a theme, protagonist, antagonist, conflict, plot development, dialogue, and evidence of a resolution.
2. Students should speak their lines while interacting with the props in the play during rehearsals.
3. Make students aware of the criteria that you will be using to grade their scenes. Their plays should demonstrate evidence of plot development, story flow, character development, dialogue, and stage props.

#### ***Student Practice***

1. Students will proofread their scenes for fluency.
2. Students will use their scripts as they read their lines in their groups for fluency.
3. Students will review other groups' scenes for authenticity.
4. Students will practice or have a dress rehearsal for their scenes. Students should not use their scripts during the rehearsals.

#### ***Assessment***

Students will perform their scene in the classroom or on stage for their classmates.

#### ***Resources***

*Literary Ideas and Scripts for Young Playwrights, Writing Your First Play, "The Key Suspect,"* student drafts, final copy, props

### ***Closure***

As teachers, we should congratulate the students on a wonderful performance.

## APPENDIX

### *THE KEY SUSPECT*

A Dramatic Scene

by

Kimberly Fain

#### CAST OF CHARACTERS

MRS. DIAZ-JONES: A married, Hispanic woman in her mid-thirties, MRS. DIAZ-JONES teaches English at Goodston Middle School. She is a hardworking teacher who cares about her students; yet, her private nature leads people to believe that she is uppity.

SHANIQUA: An intelligent, African-American seventh grader at Goodston Middle School, SHANIQUA has insecurities about being the smart kid in class. She wants to belong and does not want to be singled out as unhip or uncool. Nevertheless, she admires her English teacher, even though she does not trust people from different cultures.

AT RISE: The scene opens in MRS. DIAZ-JONES' classroom with SHANIQUA standing over her desk. SHANIQUA is in her school uniform wearing a navy blue shirt and khaki colored pants. SHANIQUA makes hasty judgments about MRS. DIAZ-JONES because she wears suits to work and because she does not know much about her teacher. MRS. DIAZ-JONES suspects that SHANIQUA is hiding something from her.

#### MRS. DIAZ-JONES

I am not trying to pressure you, but Shaniqua, I know that you can help me.

#### SHANIQUA

(tears welling in her eyes) Honest, Mrs. Diaz-Jones, I don't know anything about your keys.

#### MRS. DIAZ-JONES

Sweetie, I am not accusing you of anything, but I am in a serious bind. Do you mind just repeating to me what you saw?

#### SHANIQUA

As you were locking up your purse during first period, there was a knock on the door.

You must have left your keys to the cabinet in the lock. Well, one of the students got up and I don't want to say his name.

#### MRS. DIAZ-JONES

Whatever you say in this classroom will not be repeated.

#### SHANIQUA

Mrs. Diaz-Jones, I really need to get back to my math class. We're reviewing for a test and I need to prepare.

#### MRS. DIAZ-JONES

(tilting her head back with laughter) Shaniqua, you have an A in math class. In fact, you have the highest score in the class. I think that you could stand to miss the review.

SHANIQUA

True, but I am nervous about decimals and I-

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

(cutting SHANIQUA off in mid-sentence) I really need those keys back today. Those keys were not just the keys to my cabinet. They were the keys to my car, my husband's car, my mailbox, house, and my parent's house.

SHANIQUA

(speaking in a timid voice) You don't have another set of keys?

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

(feeling the anger rising in her voice) That's not the point. I'm uncomfortable knowing that a student on this campus has keys to my livelihood.

SHANIQUA

Your what?

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

I don't want anyone that I don't know very well carrying around the keys to my life.

SHANIQUA

With all due respect, you really should not have left your keys in the cabinet lock. You know how kids are these days, Mrs. Diaz-Jones.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

If time travel existed then I would go back and change history. Nevertheless, it's too late for regrets. Right now, you have a chance to do and say the right thing. You were sitting right by my desk.

SHANIQUA

But, I swear I did not take your keys.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

(trying to sound patient) Shaniqua, I promise that I'm not angry with you. I appreciate that you are here now trying to help me find my keys.

SHANIQUA

You always tell us not to get up without permission, but this boy got up anyway. It looked like he was sharpening his pencil behind your desk. He must have done something with them because I just don't know a thing.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

(taking out a sheet of paper and pen from her desk) If you just write down his name and what class you think he's in now I would appreciate it.

SHANIQUA

No way, Mrs. Diaz-Jones. The kids will call me a world-class snitch.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

And stealing makes that boy a thief and you an accomplice for watching and not telling.

SHANIQUA

I ain't no criminal. My momma taught me better. You think because my momma doesn't drive a Mercedes-Benz like you that means you're better than me.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

(feeling insulted) My mother rode the bus everyday and cleaned houses my whole way through college so I could stand here and teach students just like you.

SHANIQUA

The class hears you speaking in Spanish to your husband on the cell phone. We know that you talk about us.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

(laughing nervously) My husband doesn't speak Spanish. (handing SHANIQUA a picture from her desk.) This is a picture of my stepdaughter. She wears her hair similar to yours.

SHANIQUA

(holding the picture in one hand and touching her braids with the other) Oh, she's black like me.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

I grew up in this neighborhood and I went to junior high here at Goodston Middle School.

SHANIQUA

For real? I guess my momma is right. You can't judge a book by its cover. Maybe there is more to a person than meets the eye.

MRS. DIAZ-JONES

I'm going to stand by that window and give you a few minutes. I will not watch. I will give a reward to anyone that helps me find my keys, and I won't turn them into the office.

(SHANIQUA stands by the desk looking confused, and twirling her braids between her fingers.)

(MRS. DIAZ-JONES waits for a couple of minutes. She hears jingling metal and a door slam. The white paper is lying blank on the desk and before MRS. DIAZ-JONES realizes it, she is calling after SHANIQUA.)

Shaniqua you forgot your...

(MRS. DIAZ-JONES reaches the desk and sees her keys minus her sorority logo and plastic whistle. She breathes a sigh of relief because now she won't have to change the locks to her house and car.)

Thanks, Shaniqua, you gave me back the keys to my life...

**The End**



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