

# VIRTUAL VOICES: STRATEGIES FOR PLAYWRITING AND PERFORMANCE IN AN ONLINE SCHOOL DRAMA CLUB

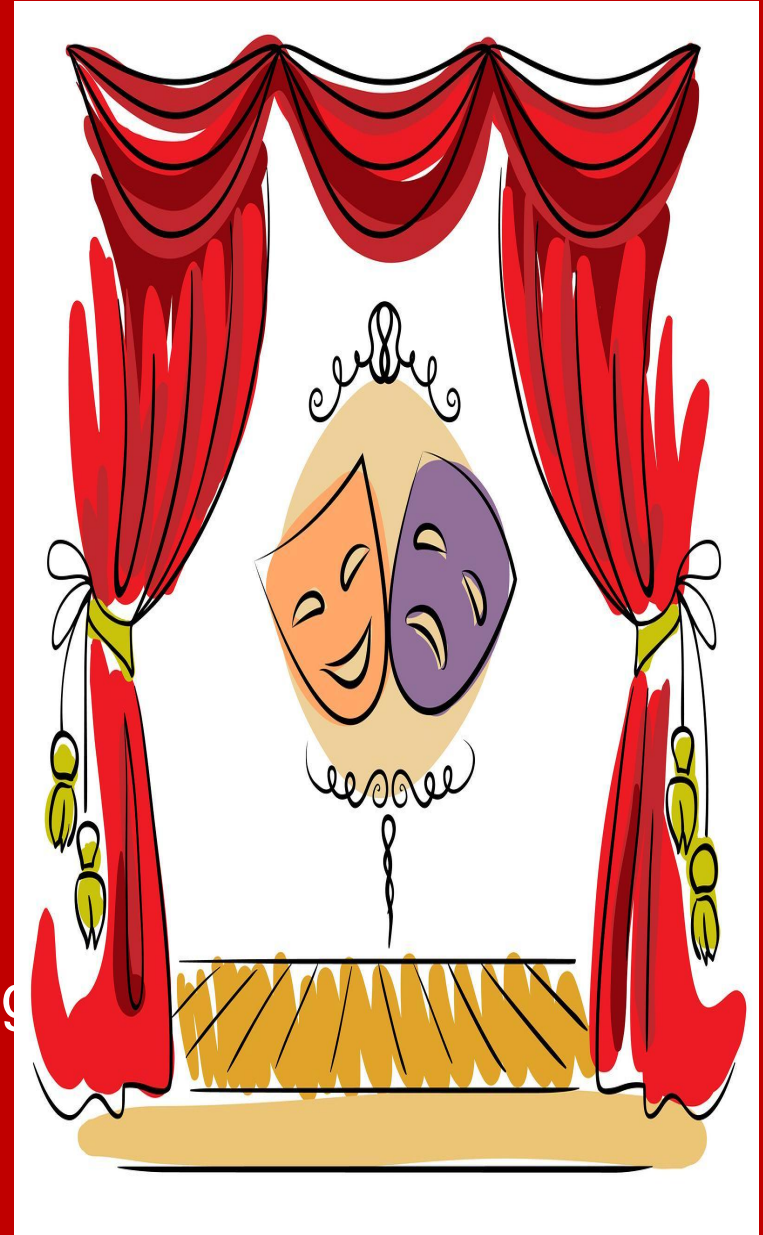
*Presenter: Maria Getz Beery*

## *Description:*

*How do we adapt and re-think the model of the traditional school drama club and performance program in a virtual environment? This session will explore how creating original work and providing opportunities to perform it can help empower students, inspire creativity and foster an environment of collaboration and community. Come to this session ready to explore your creative side!*

## JUST THE FACTS!

- ✓ The **Drama and Film Club** is going into its fifth year at Ohio Virtual Academy (OHVA).
- ✓ The club started as primarily a middle school group in its first year.
- ✓ It has now grown into a grades 6-12 club with 106 registered members.
- ✓ The club meets once per week for an hour on Fridays.
- ✓ Attendance typically averages 25-50 members per meeting.
- ✓ A separate playwriting group for students interested in writing one-act plays also meets weekly on Thursdays.





- ✓ Performance opportunities in spring one-acts
  - ✓ Improv and theatre games
  - ✓ Video editing for tech
- ✓ Playwriting for budding young writers

# Question: How do you adapt a drama club to an online format?



✓ Meetings include PowerPoint presentations on a variety of theatre topics (stage directions, scene study/acting, tech, directing, the rehearsal process, etc.) and games.

✓ We utilize a combination of chat, cameras, mics and some other technology to participate in theatre games and improvisation.

✓ Activities include individual, partnered and small group.



# PowerPoint Topic Examples

## What are Stage Directions?


- Stage directions tell where an actor is to move across the stage space.
- It is important to know stage directions in order to make rehearsals run smoothly and to help with **blocking** of scenes.

## What Are You Interested In (Theatre)?

- Performance**
  - Acting
  - Musical Theatre
  - Improvisation
  - Mime
- Technical Theatre**
  - Costume Design
  - Lighting Design
  - Set Design
  - Sound Design
  - Set Construction
  - Stage Management
- Directing**
- Playwriting**
- Publicity/Arts Management**

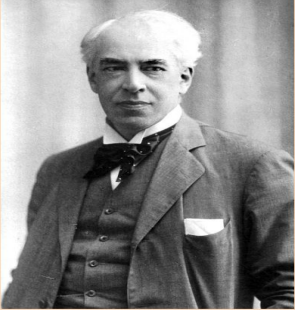


## Scene Analysis Terms



## Constantin Stanislavski

Moscow Art Theatre




## Steps in the Production Process

Let's Put On a Show!



## Genres

- ▶ Comedy
- ▶ Tragedy
- ▶ Romantic
- ▶ Musical Theatre
- ▶ Historical
- ▶ Satirical
- ▶ Classical
- ▶ Commedia Dell'Arte
- ▶ Historical Drama
- ▶ Performance Art
- ▶ Mime
- ▶ Puppetry
- ▶ Theatre for Young Audiences



## Why is **Blocking** important?

- Blocking becomes important when planning the movement in scenes.
- Blocking makes the play visually pleasing and creates beautiful **stage pictures**.
- **Stage Pictures** are visual snap-shots the director creates with the use of stage directions and blocking.

## Diagram of Stage Directions

	<b>USR</b>	<b>USC</b>	<b>USL</b>	
<b>OSR</b>	<b>SR</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>SL</b>	<b>OSL</b>
	<b>DSR</b>	<b>DSC</b>	<b>DSL</b>	

•

**AUDIENCE**

## History of Theatre

The theatre has roots in ancient Greece where a festival was held in celebration of the god Dionysus. The festival featured competitions in singing, dancing, poetry recitation and music.

The ancient Greeks had three types of drama: comedy, tragedy and the satyr play (fun, light-hearted short plays featured between the acts of tragedies featuring half-goat/half-human characters).

The first actor was Thespis of Icaria. He was the first person to appear onstage as an actor playing a character in a play. He introduced the idea of one singer or actor saying lines of dialogue and as an individual character.



# SAMPLE DRAMA AND IMPROV GAMES



## First Line/Last Line

Have students type a random simple sentence into chat.

Pair students in partners.



Have students each select a sentence.

Each student reads their sentence aloud and then must improvise dialogue and movement to logically get from the first sentence to the concluding sentence.

## Who/What/Where

Students brainstorm people/characters, actions, and settings in the chat.

Advisors or other club members pick two who's, a what, and a where.

Students are then assigned to a partner and must improvise/act out a short scene based on the who/what/where that they are given. Microphones and cameras must be turned on!





# Prop Game!

Students bring an object in their house to the meeting.

Students must then use the items as something for OTHER than what it is normally used (i.e. a toothbrush becomes a magic wand).

Cameras MUST be turned on to participate in this activity

Participants must improvise a short scene with a partner and their object. BOTH objects must be used for something other than its original intent.



## Dialogue/Playwriting Activity

Provide students with a sample generic snippet of dialogue.

Students continue the scene by improvising to a logical conclusion.

### *Variation for Playwriting*

Students write dialogue with a partner and “finish the scene” then present to the class.



A: Hi.

B: Hello.

A: I didn't know you would be here.

B: Well, it was last minute.

A: Look, I just want to apologize.

B: Don't. It's too late. It's finished.

A: If you would just let me try and explain.....

B: Oh, this ought to be good.

## DOLLAR BILL ACTIVITY

**The scenario:** Two people both find a dollar bill on the ground. They both try to grab it at the same time.

Decide WHY you NEED this dollar bill.

Improv dialogue trying to convince the other person that you should have it.

Find a resolution.

### ***Variation for playwriting***

Write a short scene using the above scenario.

\*adapted from Young Playwrights, Inc. curriculum



**Students participate in scene reading and script analysis with partners and small groups.**

## Scene Analysis Terms



**Internal-** a feature of the character's personality

*For example:*

shy

aggressive

laid-back

antsy

stubborn

kind

**External-** a physical feature of the character, something on the outside

*For example:*

An accent

A way of moving

A fidget/habit

A mannerism

A physical state such as “sleepy” or “in pain”



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**Objective/Want-** What does the character need from the other character in the scene?

*For example:*

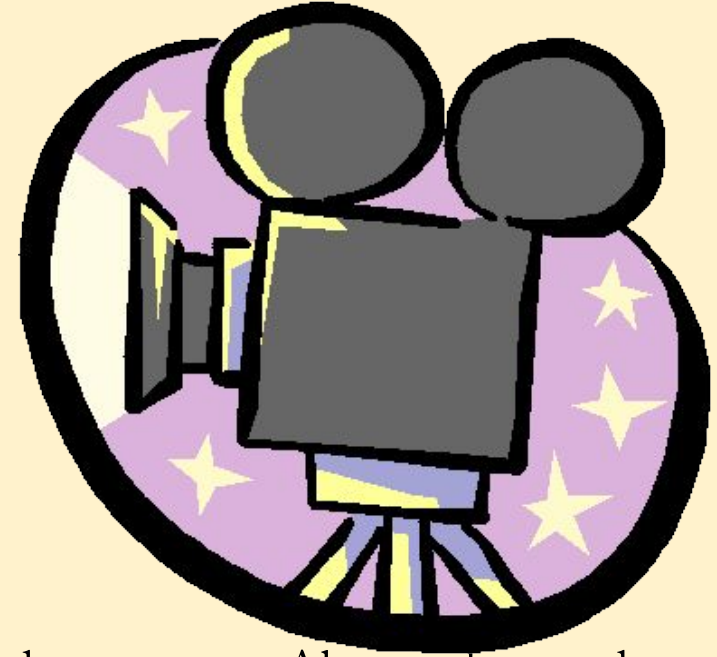
To call someone out

To gain someone's trust

To confess his/her wrongdoing

To secure someone's promise

To avoid an uncomfortable situation



**Emotional state-** A specific emotion that the character is experiencing in the moment. Always choose the SPECIFIC instead of the vague (i.e. annoyed, livid, exhilarated, exhausted, euphoric, devastated, etc.).

**Relationship-** The character's relationship(s) with the other character(s).

**Setting-** The physical location of the scene and how the character reacts to it.

# CHECK, PLEASE

by Jonathan Rand

## Scene 1

LOUIS. Hi.

GIRL. Hi there.

LOUIS. It's great to meet you.

GIRL. You, too.

LOUIS. So how long have you lived in the city?

GIRL. Oh, eighteen months? I think? It doesn't feel like it's been that long.

LOUIS. I've been here three years. It's a great city.

GIRL. Oh, definitely. What do you like most about it?

LOUIS. What do you like most about living here?

*(Pause, as GIRL is only slightly noticeably confused.)*

GIRL. Well...I love walking my dog in the park. Especially on a pretty day.

LOUIS. Yeah? Is that the truth? I love to ride my bike around the city – when the traffic is light of course.

*(He chuckles.)*

GIRL. Same here.

LOUIS. Oh and also – and this may just be me – but I have this thing for walking my dog in the park on a pretty day.

GIRL. No, I like that, too. I said so earlier.

LOUIS. So do you like watching TV?

GIRL. No.

LOUIS. Me, too! I love it!

*(Pause.)*



## The Effect of Gamma Rays On Man-In-The-Moon Marigolds

by Paul Zindel

*[Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for drama, this play is the story of Mathilda (Tillie) Hunsdorfer, a bookish, shy, yet inwardly beautiful young high school student who overcomes abuse from a jealous and acid-tongued mother and the vengeance of a pretty but mean-spirited sister. Encouraged by a teacher, Tillie carries out a gamma ray experiment with marigold seeds that wins her a prize at the school Science Fair. Through Tillie's experiment we learn that beauty can flourish even in the most barren conditions. In the two monologues that follow Tillie is awakened to the beauty of science.]*

### TILLIE

He told me to look at my hand, for a part of it came from a star that exploded too long ago to imagine. This part of me was formed from a tongue of fire that screamed through the heavens until there was our sun. And this part of me—this tiny part of me was on the sun when it itself exploded and whirled in a great storm until the planets came to be. And he said this thing was so small—this part of me was so small it couldn't be seen—but it was there from the beginning of the world. And he called this bit of me an atom. And when he wrote the word, I fell I love with it.

Atom.

Atom.

What a beautiful word.

## Sally monologue

A “C”? A “C”? I got a “C” on my coat hanger sculpture? How could anyone get a “C” in coat hanger sculpture? May I ask a question? Was I judged on the piece of sculpture itself? If so, is it not true that time alone can judge a work of art? Or was I judged on my talent? If so, is it right that I be judged on a part of life over which I have no control? If I was judged on my effort, then I was judged unfairly, for I tried as hard as I could! Was I judged on what I had learned about this project? If so, then were not you, my teacher, also being judged on your ability to transmit your knowledge to me? Are you willing to share my “C”? Perhaps I was being judged on the quality of the coat hanger itself out of which my creation was made ... Now is this not also unfair? Am I to be judged by the quality of the coat hangers that are used by the dry-cleaning establishment that returns our garments? Is that not the responsibility of my parents? Should they not share my “C”?

*SFX: The Teacher’s voice is heard offstage – (brief unintelligible squawk voice mixed with electronic static).*

*(to offstage) Thank you, Miss Othmar. (to audience) The squeaky wheel gets the grease! (exits)*

A: Hi.

B: Hello.

A: I didn't know you'd be here.

B: Well, it was last minute.

A: Look, I'm sorry about everything.

B: You don't need to apologize.

A: Yes, I do.

B: It's too late anyway. It's over.

A: At least let me try and explain.

B: Yeah, right. I can't wait to hear this.

## PLAYWRITING GROUP

The playwriting group initially grew out of the need for student performance pieces and scripts that did not require the purchase of performance or streaming rights.



The group meets weekly for several months during the school year.

Members participate in playwriting and brainstorming exercises.

Students can post play drafts on the club page discussion board and receive constructive feedback on their work from fellow members.





## Criteria for One-Act Plays

Plays must be one-act

15 pages in length

Up to 10 characters

Must have a beginning, a middle and an end

Must be appropriate for a school audience

Must be formatted using standard play formatting

Must be stageable/filmable



## STEPS TO WRITING A PLAY

Where do you want your play to take place? Think of a physical space and time period.

Create characters. What do they look like? How old are they? What do they want? Think about their personalities, dreams, mannerisms, etc.

What is the conflict of the play? How will it be resolved?

Is there a theme or main idea that you want to explore through the characters? What are some things about society, human nature or the world would you like to write about?

Think of a general topic to get you started. Here are some ideas:

Love and dating

Bullying

Family (parents, sibling rivalry, divorce, etc.)

Friendship

School (fitting in, pressures, etc.)

Social Media



## Please follow these standard formatting rules:

- Act and Scene headings are centered.
- Character's names are centered and capitalized.
- Stage directions are indented one tab and italicized.
- Character's names in stage directions are capitalized.
- Parenthetical stage directions are used for small actions.

See next slide for sample script with stage directions  
and setting descriptions!

\*Writeopia.com



Play Title: A(n) X-Act Play by [Name(s)]

CAST PAGE FORMAT:

Character 1: [Description here]

Character 2: [Description here]

[Etc]

MAIN PAGES FORMAT:

Act [Number]. Scene [Number]

SETTING: [Setting here]

*Set the scene with a more detailed description here. Notice that it is indented in such a way that each line is aligned in the same way.*

*Action goes here; characters may enter or already be at a location.*

CHARACTER 1

[Dialogue here]

CHARACTER 2

*(Short speech descriptor if you need one, like "whispering" or "in a high pitch")*

[Dialogue here]

*This is where you might put some other action, like "Character 1 gets up from the table/sofa"*

*When your scene is done, format your exits or just the lights going down like this. Then go to a new page and start the next scene with the same headings as above.*

**The End**



Act One

Scene 1

Writopia Lab, New York City. Day.

*DAN, a tall writopia instructor, sits on the couch. He munches on a bunch of potato chips, crumbs fall on his lap. He brushes them off into the crevasses of the couch. REBECCA enters the room with her coat on.*

REBECCA

Dan?

DAN

What?

REBECCA

Did you just brush off your crumbs in the couch?

DAN

*shrugging*

No.

REBECCA

You're lying. And now I have to sweep them up.

*DAN gets up and walks up to REBECCA.*

DAN

Don't worry about it. I'll do it.

*REBECCA and DAN freeze, staring at one another as the lights on them dim down. Lights come up from behind the couch, where a large chip crumb named NORMAN breaks out into song.*

NORMAN THE CRUMB

Dan won't sweep me up, he will forget about me. I'm so lucky — here at Writopia with instructors like Dan!

*Blackout.*

# SAMPLE PLAYWRITING EXERCISES



## How it works....

For each activity/prompt, students will open a separate Word or Google document.

Advisors will give writers a set amount of time to complete the task by setting a timer.

Writers will then use screenshare to share their scene or monologue with the rest of the club.

Advisors ask for volunteer actors to read the scene and/or monologue.



## The Need to Tell

Students are given a picture of a person and must answer specific questions about the individual.

What is this person's name?

Where are they? What are they doing at this place on this particular day?

What do they need to say? To whom?

Answers can be improvised and spoken or written.

Students then write a character letter as this person that then becomes a monologue.

\*adapted from Young Playwrights, Inc. curriculum





## The Need to Tell.....

Who is this person?

How old are they?

Where are they?

Why are they here?

Why is this day important?

What do they want to tell?

Who do they want to tell it to?

Why is this person important?

Write a letter from the person in the picture to the person that they “need to tell.”

Share out.

## MUSIC ACTIVITY

**STEP 1-** Listen to the music selections. Write a description of a place inspired by each snippet of music. Share out.

**STEP 2-** While listening to the music selection, imagine two characters speaking to each other in this setting. Then write a short scene between these two characters. Write as much as you can until the timer runs out. Share out. \*adapted from Young Playwrights, Inc.



## Writing for a Setting:

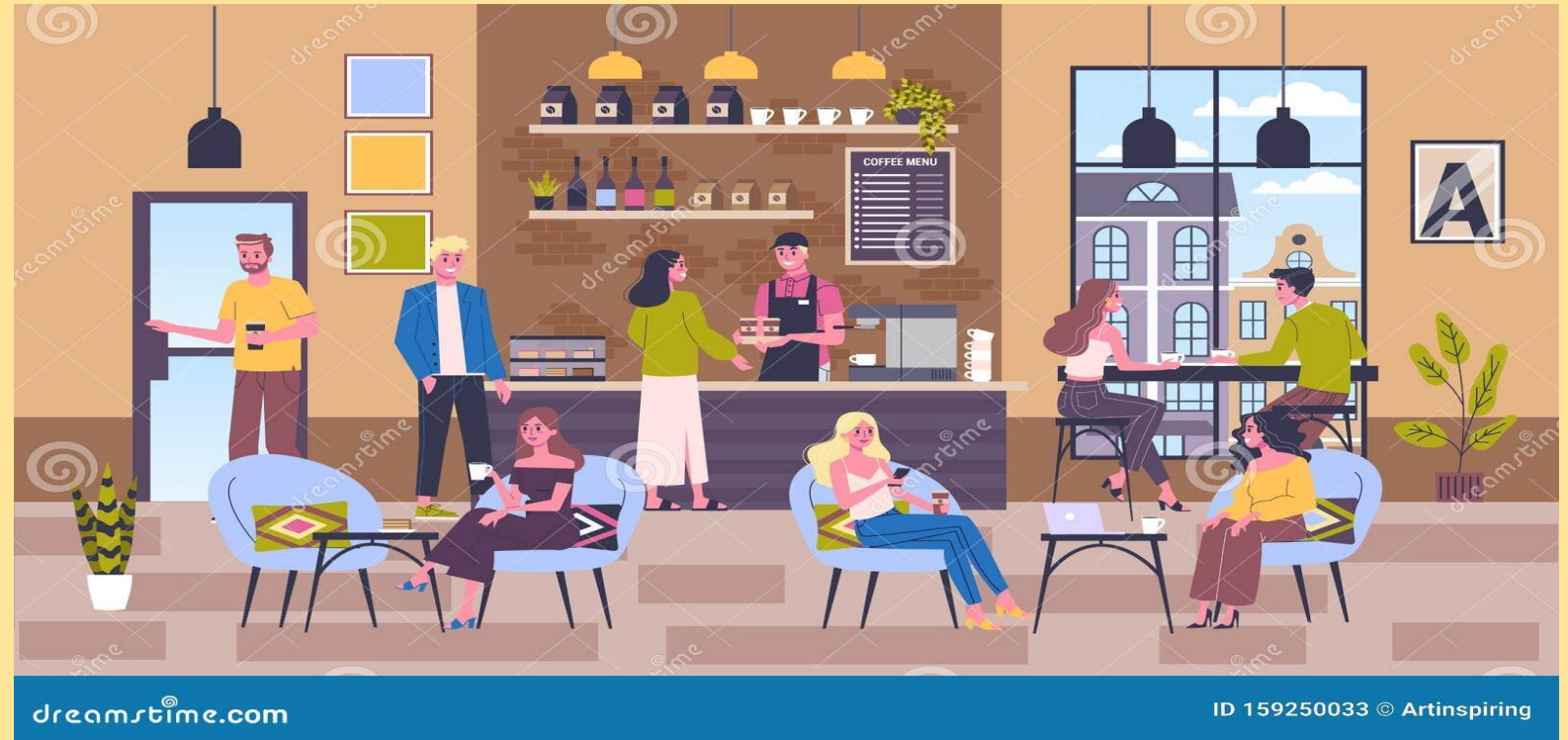
*Choose a setting:*

An empty classroom

A park

A coffeehouse

The living room in a house



Person A is already in the setting. Person B enters. Create a short scene with dialogue between these two characters. Pretend you are just listening in on their conversation and writing it down. We'll set the timer for five minutes. Write as much as you can. Feel free to share when you finish!



## SCENE STARTERS! For writing and improv



*Write a two-person scene using one of the prompts below.*

- Chris pulls Terry into an empty classroom. The first line of the monologue is “I have something important to tell you.”
- Jim/Jane stands in front of a mirror. He/she is getting up the nerve to ask someone out. What do they say?
- A girl prepares to tell her best friend she kissed her friend’s boyfriend.
- A girl/ boy prepares their story for what happened to the family car.
- Write a conversation between two ex-best friends. What do they say to each other? What do they not say?

## THE AUDITION PROCESS



Completed one-act plays are uploaded to a Google file that all club members can access via a link posted on the club page.

One-act auditions are scheduled over the course of several days.

The advisor screenshares the script during the Class Connect session, and students read for the roles that they are interested in.

Students also have the option of recording themselves reading from the script and emailing their audition to the advisors.

The cast list is posted to the club page and also announced during a drama club meeting.

# THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

Students are put into breakout rooms during a club meeting and participate in read-thru's of the individual scripts.



Actors are encouraged to make strong character choices in physical and vocal expression regarding their characters.

They should use the scene analysis and character techniques reviewed in class while rehearsing and performing.

Students should choose simple yet effective costuming and props for their characters.

They should pay close attention to any stage directions and notes from the writers.

If students are portraying more than one character in a play, they should make sure to clearly differentiate between the characters in their characterization and costuming.

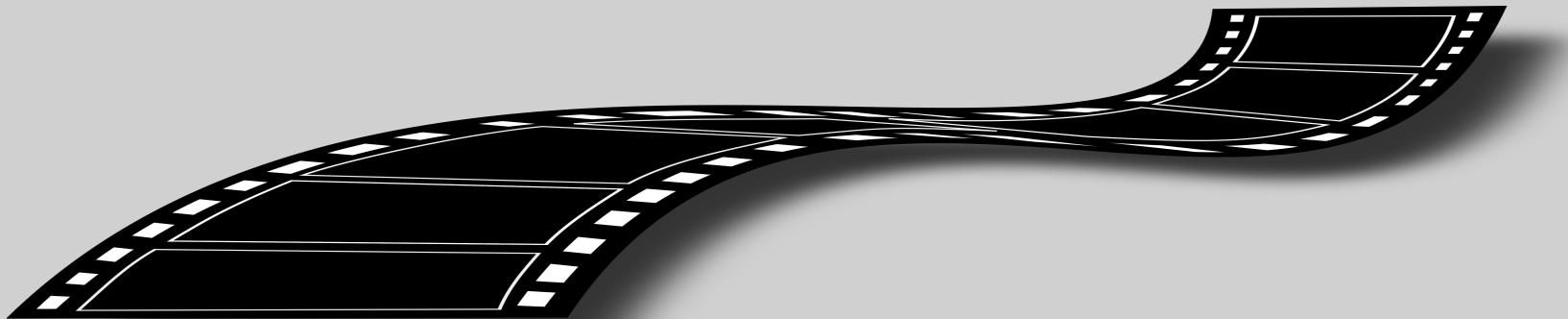
## PERFORMANCE: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Students record their individual lines in character and costumed appropriately.

Footage is submitted to the advisors.

All footage is then spliced and edited together by one of the advisors and the student editors.

Opening and closing credits, music and any special effects are then added.



# THE FINAL PERFORMANCE

The finished one-acts are screened during a special club session.

Students have access to the final films.

\*All students and parents/guardians must sign a consent form for student footage to be shared in the final performance.



# SAMPLE STUDENT WRITTEN ONE-ACT PERFORMANCES

*The Haunting of the Coat Closet*

*The Legacy of Samuel Wervin*



**It's Your Turn!**



ANY  
QUESTIONS  
?