

21L.016/21M.616 Spring 2007  
Writing Workshop with Laura Harrington  
Week One

Ask questions. Who are you? Why are you here? What do you really care about in the course work? Where does the course work connect to you personally? Where's the hook? Where's your passion? Not what you're supposed to think or say, but what you actually, really, personally care about.

Post this next to your writing desk/ computer:  
Trust your instincts. Be kind to yourself.

Handout to read: 36 Assumptions About Playwriting by Jose Rivera

Discuss: Head vs. body

You write from the body.

Rivera says: Write from your heart, your spleen, your liver, your guts. Write from your head last of all.

First draft: body. Second draft: head.

We're going to try to stay in the body today.

Language of the period – what are your primary sources? Ask for examples – read some out loud – Theatrical language is a construct. It sounds like what we think people sound like – whether that's the Bronx in 2007 or London in the 1600s. We make it up. It has the flavor of the period. It is not enslaved to the period. Theatre is not academic.

Examples:

Read the following short scenes aloud to show different use of language, to get a feel for how it is constructed, and how it reflects different time periods.

Selections from:

Edward Albee: “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”

David Mamet, “Glengarry, Glen Ross”

Tennessee Williams, “A Streetcar Named Desire”

Naomi Wallace, “One Flea Spare”

Warm Up:

Lists

I love lists because they are non-threatening. Everybody can write a list without thinking twice. It’s a great way to access your own feelings – and a tool to begin to create the world of your character.

In-class writing exercise:

2 lists of emotions – 1) I feel ... as your self 2) I feel ... as a character from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

2 lists: 1) I believe ... as yourself 2) I believe ... as a (ask for character from research) 17<sup>th</sup> century gentleman.

2 lists: 1) I want ... as yourself. 2) As a 17<sup>th</sup> century gentleman

2 lists: 1) I’m afraid of ... as yourself. 2) I’m afraid of ... as a 17<sup>th</sup> c. gentleman.

Images from the period are posted on the board.

Images: Choose one.

Why work with images?

Because theatre is 3D – you are creating an entire world.

Objects: Objects carry meaning, they can transform and they can be transformed, or destroyed.

Who does this object belong to?

Did they buy it? Was it a gift? Is it a secret? Is it forbidden?

Is it dangerous?

Voice/ voices: What do you hear? Close your eyes. Concentrate on your breathing. What do you hear?

Take the picture you have chosen as inspiration for a monologue.

Write a monologue in the voice of the character you have chosen.

(In-class exercise: 10 minutes)

Now write another monologue for this same character 10 years later in their life. First write a list of the events that have occurred in their life in those 10 years. For example – and these events should be typical of the period -- Death of a child – how old? Son or daughter? Quality of relationship? Professional success – what exactly – or failure – what exactly? Second marriage? Travel? War? Disease? Finances?

Think of your character as someone you are interviewing.

There are 2 great interview techniques to share with you.

The first asks a question of such deep import, that your subject will reveal much more than you expect: Have you ever been unjustly accused of doing something you did not do? (Think of asking Bill Clinton this question during the Monica Lewinsky scandal and imagine the many, many answers you would receive.)

The second locates your subject/ character in the physical reality of the past. This requires research on your part – you need to know the weather on the day in question. For example: It was hot that day, the day your brother was lost, wasn't it? Temperatures were in the upper 90s, weren't they?

Take your work home with you.

Read it out loud to yourself.

Note where the work has energy and life.

Note where it sounds like written work rather than spoken work.

Revise.

Read your revised version out loud to yourself.

Now what do you hear?

Further revisions?

Email me the revised version.