

Character The Need to Tell

The following is an adaptation of a core exercise from Young Playwrights Inc.'s Write A Play! Curriculum Guide. In this exercise we use monologue to explore and develop a compelling character.

Founded in 1981 by Stephen Sondheim, Young Playwrights Inc. is the only professional theater in the United States dedicated to identifying, developing, and promoting playwrights aged 18 and under: on stage, in the classroom, and in the artistic community. For more information, go to www.youngplaywrights.org.

1. Take a look at the following photographs. Select one that seems to speak to you. Take a moment to study the photograph and to think about the person pictured. When you are ready, begin to think about and answer the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers.
 - What is her or his name? Be specific. Names can be very evocative.
 - Who is this person? How old is he or she? What does he or she do for a living? What is the person's background? Does he or she have a family? Again, be specific.
 - What is special or unique about her or him? Concentrate on the things that can be observed, even if those things can't be seen in the photograph. How does this person talk, walk, dress? How does this person behave? Does this person have any observable quirks that tell us something about his or her personality?
 - Where is she or he? Derive what information you can from the photograph, and continue to use your imagination from there. Be as specific as you can.
For example: A restaurant. What kind of restaurant? Expensive or cheap? Does she or he eat there all the time or is this the first time? What's the name of the restaurant?
 - How does she or he feel about being there? Why? Happy? Sad? Angry? Worried? What does the expression in the picture tell you? Thinking about these things gives the character an identity grounded in place, time, and tone.
 - What does this person need, want, or dream about?
 - What's stopping her or him from getting it?

2. When you are ready, allow your character to begin to speak. Your character should speak in the first person (using I, me , my, mine, etc.) and you should focus on what the character **Needs To Tell** by thinking about the following questions.

- What does she or he need to tell?
- Who is she or he telling?
- Why does this need to be told today?

The character doesn't need to answer these questions, but the answers should be what drives her or his words.

3. When you get to a comfortable stopping place, reread what you've written and revise thinking about the following:

- Who is this character talking to?
- Is she or he alone in the room?
- What specific choices is he or she making in the way he or she speaks?
- What happens next?
- Who might the other characters be?
- What might happen?