

Eugene Toh
UWP 1
Literacy Narrative

“A Tale of Two Plays”

“I’m finally done!” I exclaimed. After spending what seemed like a million hours staring at the screen of my laptop and typing incessantly, I had finally completed the script for a play for my high school drama class. Our class had been separated into groups of eight and each group was tasked with coming up with a 20-minute play based off one of the time periods in British history. Our group chose to do a play about Industrial Revolution and we wanted to explore the increasing role of women in the industrial workforce.

We brainstormed a few ideas in class about the plot of our play and managed to come up with an outline. Our protagonist was going to be a young woman whose husband had died in an accident and was now left alone to care for the children and the house. She sees a poster calling for women to join the workforce and decides to take up a job to make ends meet. While campaigning for more women to be allowed to join the workforce and be treated equally, she is met with resistance from people who would prefer if things never changed.

Since I was the one who had contributed the most ideas to the plot, everyone agreed that I should be the one to write the script. I was nervous. I had never written a script before. The only writing I had ever done was for class and it was always an essay. Writing a story was simple. Arguing a point was simple. Coming up with a script did not seem so simple. I had to tell a story only through conversation and action. I was not sure how or where to begin.

So, I decided to use the internet to search for examples of scripts of plays and musicals. I spent some time researching how writers used dialogue and action to tell a story. Even as I figured out how to use conversations to move the plot forward, I still had to develop the individual characters. Each role had to be unique and have its own voice and set of motivations. I found this to be the biggest challenge. Our drama teacher decided that he would not be expecting us to use the actual speech patterns and slang from our chosen eras but we still had to be as realistic as possible.

I spent some time imagining how the story would play out on stage and that helped me come up with the dialogue. Once I managed to come up with a couple of lines and phrases of dialogue, the rest started to flow out immediately. Scene by scene, the play was starting to take form. I stared at the screen of my laptop. I was proud of what I had accomplished. The script was definitely far from perfect and I knew it needed some revisions. The pace of the play seemed a little uneven and the ending had to be edited so that it would not seem rushed. There were also moments in the play that were a little heavy on exposition. I had to reduce the number of monologues and include more scenes with the characters interacting with each other. Eventually, I decided that I would let the group read the draft first before changing anything. Nonetheless, as a fifteen year old, I was quite impressed with myself.

The thing I enjoyed most about writing this script was probably the freedom I had to explore the story. I didn't feel confined by a prompt or certain topic that came with writing an essay for class. Up until then, I was never really offered the opportunity to write creatively and come up with an original story. Being able to use my imagination to

write a script felt liberating. I found the writing process to be less stressful because I was in control of the story.

In retrospect, the characters in that very first play I wrote were probably very simplified and lacked the complexity of any real-life individual. It took me a while to learn how to create better characters who would add layers of depth to the story. Later on, in tenth grade, I had to read plays like *The Tempest* and *Journey's End* in English class. Those plays gave me better insights into the structure of a drama, how characters interact with each other, and how to concentrate my story on relatively few characters but still be able to tell engaging stories. On top of that, I felt like I was able to write more realistic dialogue by learning from the books I had read outside of class and the movies and television shows I had watched. After that performance in drama class, I would go on to write a few more short scripts for other school projects.

Once I got into boarding school, I knew I wanted to participate in drama competitions. We had a similar structure to Hogwarts where students were divided up into four houses. I was sorted into Diamond house. Some of the bigger events included the traditional Malaysian historical dramas or contemporary musicals. For one of the musicals that I co-directed for my house, the theme was to come up with original stories and use modern pop songs. Naturally, I wanted to write the script but wanted everyone's input on the outline of the plot.

As a team, we decided to do a story about a young woman who had just gotten out of a relationship. During a chance encounter, she meets a witch who pretends to be a matchmaker. The witch manages to find the young woman a perfect match and initially, it seems like the young woman has really found her true love. Towards the end of the

musical, we reveal that the young woman had actually mistook someone else for her intended match. She thought that she had fallen in love with the man that the matchmaker had intended for her. Now, she was forced to decide between the intended match the witch has chosen and the man she mistook as her intended. I wanted our musical to have a plot twist that could really surprise the audience and hopefully, make our play unique.

Apart from our plot twist, I knew that we needed to do something with the musical aspect of the performance that would help us stand out. We did decide on a good selection of songs that we were going to use but I wanted something more original. So, I came up with the idea of changing the lyrics of one of the songs to better fit our narrative. While most other groups would have to find songs that would fit in with their plotlines, my team decided to change the song's lyrics so that it could help us tell part of our story through the song.

I decided to rework the lyrics of Taylor Swift's 'Blank Space', which was getting very popular at that time. It took me a while to figure out what lines to switch so that the song could relate to our plot better. I think during this process I had probably listened to the song about 100 times and grew tired of it by the end. After many hours of editing, we eventually settled on a version. We didn't make too many changes till it was unrecognizable but just enough so that the audience could notice.

Our musical was really well received by both the judges and the audience. We placed first out of the four competing teams. A common refrain my team heard was that people enjoyed our version of the 'Blank Space' song and the plot twist at the end of our musical. I was very thankful to the actors for bringing the script to life and for fully committing to each of the roles.

After working on the musical, I could definitely tell that I had grown as a writer from high school to boarding school. I was writing stories that were more complex and the characters in these stories were more fully developed. I avoided using stereotypes and writing one-dimensional roles. I became more capable at using dialogue to inform the audience of what was going on in the story. I felt more confident as a writer because I was allowed to use my creativity in my writing. I was never a big fan of writing to begin with but writing scripts and coming up with original ideas helped me grow as a writer.

Re-worked lyrics to Taylor Swift's Blank Space for musical:

*highlighted lyrics indicate lyric amendments

Nice to meet you, where you been?
I could show you incredible things
Magic, madness, heaven, sin
Saw you there and I thought
Oh my God, look at that face
You can be my protégé
Love's a game, want to play?

New money, suit and tie
I can find you a perfect guy
Ain't it funny, rumors fly
And I know you can be lonely
So hey, let's be friends
I'm dying to see how this one ends
Grab your passport and my hand
I can bring the good guys here in a second

So it's gonna be forever
Or it's gonna go down in flames
Please invite me to your wedding
I could be the perfect bridesmaid

You got a long list of ex-lovers
They tell me you're insane
'Cause I know you love the players
And they love the game

'Cause you're young and they're reckless
We'll take this way too far
He will leave you breathless
Or with a brand new car

You got a long list of ex-lovers
They tell me you're insane
But you've got a blank space baby
And I'll write his name

Boys only want love if it's torture
Don't say I didn't say I didn't warn ya
Boys only want love if it's torture
Don't say I didn't say I didn't warn ya

So it's gonna be forever
Or it's gonna go down in flames
You just need to sign your name here
And I'll make your true love appear

You got a long list of ex-lovers
They tell me you're insane
'Cause I know you love the players
And I love the game

'Cause you're young and too reckless
You'll take this way too far
He will leave you breathless
Or with an old guitar

You got a long list of ex-lovers
They'll tell you I'm insane
But you've got a blank space baby
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