

WHARTON CENTER INSTITUTE FOR ARTS & CREATIVITY &
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

2020-2021 YOUNG PLAYWRIGHTS FESTIVAL
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Young Playwrights Festival?

Michigan high school students write and submit original theatrical monologues to a juried competition. Twelve finalist scripts will be selected to be produced and performed at Wharton Center by MSU Theatre Department students preceded by a mentoring process. The final product will be filmed and edited for viewing on Wharton Center's website.

What are the awards?

All 12 finalists will receive certificates of participation and a \$200 award.

How can students learn to write a theatrical monologue?

Included in this packet are tips for writing a theatrical monologue.

What is the professional theatre mentoring aspect of YPF?

Mentors are directors or playwrights from Michigan and around the Midwest who are currently working in the professional theatre and have had experience working with young people. Once the twelve finalists are selected, they will be assigned a mentor. For the next 4-5 weeks, playwrights and their mentors will work to make revisions in the script. Communication will be by email, phone, or both. Once the revisions are completed, the revised monologues will be sent to MSU Dept. of Theatre in preparation for rehearsals. Playwrights are required to revise their monologues during this process. Refusal to work with the mentor and receive constructive feedback on your monologue could result in withdrawal of the play from the Festival.

- Mentors for 2020-21 have not yet been determined.

What is the schedule of events for the Festival?

January 27, 2021: Deadline to submit scripts (electronic date stamped)

January 2021: Twelve finalists selected

February 25, 2021: Twelve monologues are selected to be produced on stage, and playwrights are assigned a professional theatre mentor

April 2021: MSU Department of Theatre directors and actors begin rehearsing the monologues.

April 2021/ Early May: Monologues are filmed in the Pasant Theatre. Writers to be invited to watch their monologues filmed pending approval by Michigan State University COVID-19 policy on public gatherings. There will be no audience at this event, only the actor, crew, staff, and writer if they wish.

More information can be found at www.whartoncenter.com/ypf.

- Scripts may be submitted to Cara Davison instituteintern@whartoncenter.com
- For questions: Bert Goldstein goldst72@whartoncenter.com

SCRIPT SUBMISSION RULES

- Eligibility:** Each participant must:
- Be a Michigan high school student in grades 9 – 12.
 - Be sponsored by a teacher willing to serve as the liaison between Wharton Center, the school, and the student applicant.
 - Submit an application form with monologue.
 - If you are selected among the twelve finalists:
 - You must be willing and available to work with a professional theatre mentor for 4-5 weeks prior to rehearsal.
- Guidelines:** All plays must:
- Be original works.
 - Have no more than 1 character.
 - Require only simple props, costumes, settings, and effects.
 - Have a maximum length of 2 pages.
- Format:** Scripts must be submitted as a Word document with pages numbered. Please include a “cover” page that includes title of monologue, setting, plot, and brief character description. Do not include student names on scripts as they are sent to judges anonymously).

Email scripts to: Cara Davison instituteintern@whartoncenter.com

All entries must be submitted electronically by Wednesday, January 27, 2021.

Failure to meet any of the rules or guidelines will be grounds for disqualification from the Festival. Judges’ decisions are final. Awards are not transferable.

Guiding Thoughts on Writing a Theatrical Monologue for the 2021 Young Playwright's Festival

Due to the restrictions of COVID-19 we are taking a different approach to the Young Playwright's Festival this year. Instead of plays, we are asking students to write and submit a 1-2-page theatrical monologue. We will select 12 of these, and they will be rehearsed and performed by students in the MSU Department of Theatre. Since we can't gather for live performances, these will be filmed, edited, and broadcast on Wharton Center's social media platforms for audiences to watch.

A theatrical monologue is different than writing a play but can be an exciting theatrical device. Your draft to us does not have to be perfect. If your monologue is selected, you will be mentored by a theatre professional who will assist you in revising your writing. Here are some suggestions and strategies for writing a theatrical monologue:

- A theatrical monologue is largely a short, self-contained play featuring one character.
- One decision you will have to make is whether the character is talking to another character who is presumably on stage with them **OR** a soliloquy where the character is addressing the audience directly **OR** talking to themselves (much like a Shakespeare soliloquy). Either style is fine with us.
- Once you have made that decision create a story around the monologue that should answer several questions like:
 - 1) Who is the character? (age, gender, social status, personality type, ethnicity)
 - 2) What is the character's emotional state, and how does that change during the course of the monologue?
 - 3) What is the conflict? What is their current situation/problem/dilemma/crisis? This is one of the most important aspects to tackle.
 - 4) What do they want – what are they trying to “get”, what problem are they trying to resolve?
 - 5) The monologue should tell a complete story meaning it should have a beginning, middle, and an end. It should fully inform the audience as to what the conflict is and how the character is wrestling with it.
 - 6) While not required, try to incorporate some dramatic action into your writing (the character is writing a letter, eating, living on the streets, in a car, in a public place) anything that might provide some action. However, it is okay to have the character sit still and talk to us. The point is, don't be afraid to include dramatic action if it helps you create a better piece. Even someone sitting in a chair talking to the audience can be doing something.
 - 7) A lot of monologues will end with the character making a big decision as to how to resolve the conflict or what their next step might be to resolve the conflict. We encourage you to do that.

- 8) We have included two monologues from plays. One is from *Fences* by August Wilson, where the character of Rose is talking to another character on stage, and the other is from a play called the *House of Blue Leaves*, where Ronnie is talking to the audience. These are good examples. You can also look at other plays for monologues – there are thousands.
- 9) After you have written your monologue, read it out loud or, better yet, have someone else read it so you can listen to it and hear how it sounds. You might want to make changes after you have heard it.

SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

- ___ ELECTRONIC APPLICATION FILLED OUT <https://forms.gle/73Pn4uPyz1yVa6me8>
- ___ SCRIPT MUST BE TYPED AND SUBMITTED AS A MICROSOFT WORD DOCUMENT
- ___ PAGES NUMBERED
- ___ ONE (1) COPY OF ELECTRONIC SCRIPT
- ___ ONE COPY OF SCRIPT INCLUDING COVER PAGE
(DO NOT INCLUDE NAME ON SCRIPT. SCRIPTS ARE ANONYMOUS TO JUDGES)

EMAIL COMPLETED SCRIPT TO: instituteintern@whartoncenter.com

ALL ENTRIES MUST BE POSTMARKED/RECEIVED VIA EMAIL BY
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021

yourself. You're a day late and a dollar short when it comes to an understanding with me.

TROY. It's just ... She gives me a different idea ... a different understanding about myself. I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and problems ... be a different man. I ain't got to wonder how I'm gonna pay the bills or get the roof fixed. I can just be a part of myself that I ain't never been.

ROSE. What I want to know ... is do you plan to continue seeing her? That's all you can say to me.

TROY. I can sit up in her house and laugh. Do you understand what I'm saying. I can laugh out loud ... and it feels good. It reaches all the way down to the bottom of my shoes. *(Pause)* Rose, I can't give that up.

ROSE. Maybe you ought to go on and stay down there with her ... if she a better woman than me.

TROY. It ain't about nobody being a better woman or nothing. Rose, you ain't the blame. A man couldn't ask for no woman to be a better wife than you've been. I'm responsible for it. I done locked myself into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forgot about myself.

ROSE. What the hell was I there for? That was my job, not somebody else's.

TROY. Rose, I done tried all my life to live decent ... to live a clean ... hard ... useful life. I tried to be a good husband to you. In every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don't know. But ... you born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate. You got to guard it closely ... always looking for the curve-ball on the inside corner. You can't afford to let none get past you. You can't afford a call strike. If you going down ... you going down swinging. Everything lined up against you. What you gonna do. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted. When I found you and Cory and a halfway decent job ... I was safe. Couldn't nothing touch me. I wasn't gonna strike

~~out no more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary. I~~

ROSE. I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too. I gave eighteen years of my life to stand in the same spot with you. Don't you think I ever wanted other things? Don't you think I had dreams and hopes? What about my life? What about me. Don't you think it ever crossed my mind to want to know other men? That I wanted to lay up somewhere and forget about my responsibilities? That I wanted someone to make me laugh so I could feel good? You not the only one who's got wants and needs. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my wants and needs, my dreams ... and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and waited and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. and it

didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom.

But I held on to you, Troy, I held you tighter. You was my husband. I owed you everything I had. Every part of me I could find to give you. And upstairs in that room ... with the darkness falling in on me ... I gave everything I had to try and erase the doubt that you wasn't the finest man in the world, and wherever you was going ... I wanted to be there with you. Cause you was my husband. Cause that's the only way I was gonna survive as your wife. You always talking about what you give ... and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take ... and don't even know nobody's giving!

(ROSE turns to exit into the house; TROY grabs her arm.)

(TROY gets to his feet and starts at CORY.)

ROSE. Troy ... no. Please! Troy!

(ROSE pulls on TROY to hold him back. TROY stops himself.)

TROY. *(To CORY.)* All right. That's strike two. You stay away from around me, boy. Don't you strike out. You living with a full count. Don't you strike out. *(TROY exits out the yard as the LIGHTS go down.)*

ACT II

Scene 2

It is six months later, early afternoon. TROY enters from the house and starts to exit the yard. ROSE enters from the house.

ROSE. Troy, I want to talk to you.

TROY. All of a sudden, after all this time, you want to talk to me, huh? You ain't wanted to talk to me for months. You ain't wanted to talk to me last night. You ain't wanted no part of me then. What you wanna talk to me about now?

ROSE. Tomorrow's Friday.

TROY. I know what day tomorrow is. You think I don't know tomorrow's Friday? My whole life I ain't done nothing but look to see Friday coming and you got to tell me it's Friday.

ROSE. I want to know if you're coming home.

34 THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES ACT I

ARTIE. (*Grabbing his coat.*) Over the threshold . . .

(*They go out.*)

BUNNY. Artie, are you dressed warm? Are you dressed warm? Your music! You forgot your music! You gotta get it blessed by the Pope!

(*BANANAS appears in the doorway and grabs the music from BUNNY.*)

BANANAS. (*Sings.*)

It really was cornical.

The Pope wore a yarmulke

The day that the Pope came to New York.

BUNNY. You witch! You'll be in Bellevue tonight with enough shock treatments they can plug Times Square into your ear. I didn't work for Con Edison for nothing! (*Storms out after them. Slams the door behind her.*)

(*The bedroom door RONNIE went into at the beginning of the act opens. RONNIE comes out carrying a large box. He comes D. and stares at us.*)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

RONNIE is standing in the same position staring at us. He takes two hand grenades out of the pockets of his fatigues, wire, his father's alarm clock. He wires them together, setting the alarm on the clock at a special time. During this, he speaks to us. He is very young—looks barely seventeen—his hair is all shaved off; he is tall, skinny; he speaks with deep, suffocated, religious fervor. His eyes bulge with a strange mixture of terrifying innocence and diabolism. You can't figure out whether he'd be a gargoyle on some Gothic cathedral or a skinny cherub on some altar.

RONNIE. My father tell you all about me? Pope Ronnie? Charmed life? How great I am? That's how he is with you. You should hear him with me, you'd sing a different tune pretty quick, and it wouldn't be "Where Is the Devil in Evelyn." (*He exits into his room and comes out a moment later, carrying a large, dusty box. He opens it. From it, he takes a bright red altar boy cassock and surplice that fit him when he was twelve. He speaks to us as he dresses.*) I was twelve years old and all the newspapers had headlines on my twelfth birthday that Billy was coming to town. And *Life* was doing stories on him and *Look* and the newsreels because Billy was searching America to find the Ideal American Boy to play Huckleberry Finn. And Billy came to New York and called my father and asked him if he could stay here—Billy needed a hideout. In Waldorf Astorias all over the country, chambermaids would wheel silver carts to change the sheets. And out of the sheets would hop little boys saying, "Hello, I'm Huckleberry Finn." All over the country, little boys dressed in blue jeans and straw hats would be sent to him in crates, be under the silver cover covering his dinner, his medicine cabinet in all his hotel rooms, his suitcase—"Hello, hello, I'm Huckleberry Finn." And

he was coming here to hide out. Here—Billy coming here—I asked the nun in school who was Huckleberry Finn—

The nun in Queen of Martyrs knew. She told me. The Ideal American Boy. And coming home, all the store windows reflected me and the mirror in the tailor shop said, "Hello, Huck." The butcher shop window said, "Hello, Huck. Hello, Huckleberry Finn. All America wants to meet Billy and he'll be hiding out in your house." I came home—went in there—into my room and packed my bag. . . . I knew Billy would see me and take me back to California with him that very day. This room smelled of ammonia and air freshener and these slipcovers were new that day and my parents were filling up the icebox in their brand-new clothes, filling up the icebox with food and liquor as excited as if the Pope was coming—and nervous because they hadn't seen him in a long while—Billy. They told me my new clothes were on my bed. To go get dressed. I didn't want to tell them I'd be leaving shortly to start a new life. That I'd be flying out to California with Billy on the H.M.S. *Huckleberry*. I didn't want tears from them—only trails of envy. . . . I went to my room and packed my bag and waited.

The doorbell rang. (*Starts hitting two notes on the piano.*) If you listen close, you can still hear the echoes of those wet kisses and handshakes and tears and backs getting hit and "Hello, Billy"s, "Hello." They talked for a long time about people from their past. And then my father called out: "Ronnie, guess who? Billy, we named him after your father. Ronnie, guess who?"

I picked up my bag and said Goodbye to myself in the mirror. Came out. Billy there. Smiling.

It suddenly dawned on me. You had to do things to get parts.

I began dancing. And singing. Immediately. Things I have never done in my life—before or since. I stood on my head and skipped and whirled— (*He does a cartwheel.*) spectacular leaps in the air so I could see veins

in the ceiling—ran up and down the keys of the piano and sang and began laughing and crying soft and loud to show off all my emotions. And I heard music and drums that I couldn't even keep up with. And then cut off all my emotions just like that. Instantly. And took a deep bow like the Dying Swan I saw on Ed Sullivan. I picked up my suitcase and waited by the door.

Billy turned to my parents, whose jaws were down to about there, and Billy said, "You never told me you had a mentally retarded child. You never told me I had an idiot for a godchild," and I picked up my bag and went into my room and shut the door and never came out the whole time he was here.

My only triumph was he could never find a Huckleberry Finn. Another company made the picture a few years later, but it flopped.

My father thinks I'm nothing. Billy. My sergeant. They laugh at me. You laughing at me? I'm going to fool you all. By tonight, I'll be on headlines all over the world. Cover of *Time*. *Life*. TV specials. (*Shows a picture of himself on the wall.*) I hope they use this picture of me—I look better with hair—Go ahead—laugh. Because you know what I think of you? (*Gives us hesitant Bronx cheers.*) I'm sorry you had to hear that—pay seven or eight dollars to hear that. But I don't care. I'll show you all. I'll be too big for any of you.

~~(He is now fully dressed as an altar boy. The sound of a key in the door. ARTIE is heard singing "The Day the Pope Came to New York." RONNIE exits to his room.)~~

ARTIE. Bunny says, "Arthur, I am not talking to you," but I'll say it to the breeze: "Arthur, get your music. 'Bring on the Girls.' Hold up your music for when the Pope His Holiness rides by." (*To us.*) You heard these songs. They don't need blessings. I hate to get all kissy-ass, you know? But it can't hurt. "Bring on the Girls." Where is it? Whenever Bunny cleans up in here you never