**Transcription**
**Anyone Can Write a Play, Episode 1 – It Only Takes Two Words**

Video (with closed captions): <https://youtu.be/8PDgrnG_gZc>

[♪ Upbeat electronic music]

MEGHAN TYLER:

Hello there, my name is Meghan Tyler. I'm a playwright and an actor and all-round sort of creative human person, and welcome to 'Anyone Can Write a Play'. This is going to be a 4-part workshop series which is part of the Traverse Theatre's First Stages Festival.

Now, anyone can write a play. That sounds like it might not be a true statement but it is one that I believe, so I promise you if you're watching from now until the end of this workshop series, we are going to write a play together. Anyone can write a play. That might be quite the statement that you're sat at home going 'well that's bollocks, you have to go to uni to study playwrighting, and you have to join a bunch of courses to do playwrighting, and not anyone can write a play'. I'm here to tell you that you're wrong.

I started my training as an actor, did not expect the playwriting thing to kick off at all. I sort of on the daily have this imposter fear syndrome, where I'm at the laptop and my little brain is going, 'what are you doing, you're not trained for this, there's people who know structure, I don't know structure!' It's not that difficult, you don't need to have a robust playwriting education to be able to write a play. The thing is, we're all storytellers, we all have that ability. If you tell a story about something funny you saw at the shop, and you come back and you relay that to your flatmates, you're storytelling. Watching films and tv shows, that's storytelling and you're absorbing that like a sponge, because that's what we do. We've been innate storytellers since the dawn of time, since a half ape man drew a little thing on a wall, we're storytellers. So basically, anyone can write a play.

I'm not only going to say that as a statement and talk in this sort of fruity way about playwriting. What we're going to do over the course of these four workshops is using tools, using different exercises that might seem a little bit off the wall, just from two words that you guys will come up with yourselves, we're all gonna write a play. So from the start of this workshop to the end of this workshop I promise you we will all write a play. Now it will just be like a 20-minute two-hander, but that's something so let's get started.

For this 4-part workshop series I've enlisted the help of Cathan McRoberts, who has offered to be the guinea pig for this. Cathan, have you ever written a play before?

CATHAN MCROBERTS:

No.

MEGHAN:

Does the idea scare you a little bit?

CATHAN:

Terrifies me.

MEGHAN:

Yes okay cool, so Cathan's gonna act as you guys, he's gonna ask me questions if things aren't clear, he's gonna ask me questions on the workshops and is just gonna act as a sort of example so that you guys have an actual representation here of how this will work.

So basically, what you'll need for this next section is paper and a pen. You can also just like, people write the way they write – if you're more comfortable to dictate it with your voice to your phone, if you want to type on your phone, if you want to use your laptop that's totally fine. Just whatever method you guys need to use for writing, do that. And so we're doing pen and paper, nice, so let's do the first exercise.

So, I want you to come into this with no preconceived ideas, no back catalogue of plays that you're working on at the minute, or stories you're working on or characters you've thought of. Completely blank slate. So what we're gonna do in order to achieve that is clear your minds. Now this is just going to sort of uncork all of the murkiness, and I recommend that before you do the next bits of the workshop series, you do this every time, and that you do this before you put pen to paper, before you approach a laptop or dictate on your phone, I would recommend just doing this nice brain clearing exercise to get your heads open and ready for creativity. I have actually stolen this exercise from a writing workshop I did back in the day. That's how good it works! So it's called the seven I's, which is strictly not true because... you'll see in a second.

Now what I'm going to do is read out seven short statements. They're headers and I want you to write them at the top of a page, so I would write the first one on the top of this page, I'd write the second one at the top of this page and so on and so forth, is that clear?

CATHAN:

Yep.

MEGHAN:

Okay so the first one is 'I worry that.' I worry that.

Okay number two is, 'I have learned.' I have learned.

Number three is 'my heart feels,' that's the rule breaker because it's not an I. ‘My heart feels'. Number four is 'I think'.

Number five is 'I love'.

Number six is 'I hate'.

And number seven is 'I hope'.

So number one, 'I worry that.' Number two, 'I have learned.' Number three 'my heart feels,' number four, 'I think,' number five 'I love,' number six 'I hate' and number seven 'I hope'.

Now the way this works is kind of like word vomit grocery list, so you're just gonna, first thing that comes to mind for each of these statements. Now I'm gonna set a timer and we're gonna do a minute on each one so basically like 'I hate the conservatives I hate when my socks get wet I hate onions', like first thing that comes to head even if it's a bit weird, even if you're not expecting it just write it down and get the word vomit out. So I'm going to set a timer on your phone, can you set a timer on your phone please for me? Or can you give me the phone?

Okay, so. You ready to begin, a minute on each one.

CATHAN:

Starting from the first one?

MEGHAN:

Starting from the first one obviously, yeah. So number one, 'I worry that' - go!

Test up, next one, number two. I have learned,' go!

Stop, stop!

CATHAN:

I've stopped.

MEGHAN:

Number three, my heart feels. Go.

Stop. Number four, 'I think'. Go.

Stop. Number five, 'I love.' Go.

Stop. Number six, 'I hate'. Go.

Stop. The last one, 'I hope'. I hope. Go.

And stop.

There you go, so those are the seven I's and it's a good way of just sort of clearing out all the murkiness from your brain. How do you feel after that?

CATHAN:

Less murky!

MEGHAN:
That's a good answer. Okay well done, now we're going to start creating. So 'It only takes two words' is the technical name of this episode and that's because it does. So we're going to find two words that are going to create our setting, our characters, our themes. We're going to tease out a lot of things from these two words. Now you're probably sat there at home going, how are two words gonna...? Let me show you.

I'm gonna ask you two very simple questions that are gonna create these two words, and the first of those very simple questions is, what is your favourite word of the day today? What is your favourite word of the day today?

My favourite word of the day today is... Crispy. Crispy. So I'm gonna write that at the top of a page: crispy. Cathan what's your favourite word of the day today?

CATHAN:

My favourite word of the day today is growth.

MEGHAN:

Growth. Okay, so write that at the top of your page. Now the second question I'm going to ask to create our other word is what's your least favourite word of the day today? My least favourite word of the day today is... belch. Yeah belch, it's my least favourite word of the day today. So I'm going to write it on my other page, so I've got crispy up here and belch over here. Cathan what's your least favourite word of the day today?

CATHAN:

Least favourite word of the day today is... Let's go with… Swelter.

MEGHAN:

Oh I hate it! Swelter, it's a good one, it's a good awful word, swelter. Okay so now you should have your favourite word of the day and your least favourite word of the day. Now what we're going to do with these two words is a little exercise that is going to sort of work how we did the seven I's beforehand. So you're gonna do a connection brain vomit shopping list thing. So I've got crispy here, which I would be like okay, winter, and frost, potato cheese and onion crisps, umm, crispy bacon, would sort of start making connecting words.

So what we're going to do is for - connecting words and phrases, sorry - so what we're gonna do for two minutes per word, I'll set another timer, is just do this sort of mind word map again. Is that clear?

CATHAN:

Yeah.

MEGHAN:

Okay so I'm gonna set a timer for two minutes, and for two minutes under our favourite word we're gonna write a word map. Ready, three two one go!

Got 10 seconds left…

And stop, good job guys. Okay so you should have a nice little word map for your favourite word, or mind vomit map for your most favourite word, and now we're gonna go on to our least favourite word. So two minutes on our least favourite word, starting from now.

Got 10 seconds left…

Okay and stop. Cool, so now underneath your favourite word of the day and your least favourite word of the day you should have many many many many words. Now in this final part I'm going to show you how to use logic from these to create character, setting and some themes.

Okay, so for the next stage of this exercise what we're going to do is we're going to start sort of spitballing from the words we have and start making sort of logical connections between them to inspire us for a second, for two characters and for some general themes. So my favourite word of the day today was crispy, and from that I've got winter, frost, crunch, Christmas, burned food, delicate, cans, biscuits, Great British Bake Off, I've got like a bunch of words that have either sounded like that word or have just come into my brain directly connected to that word, like crispy bacon. So Cathan, what about your favourite word, what are some of the words you came up with from your favourite word?

CATHAN:

Uh so I had growth, and from that I had life, crops, circle of life, underneath, stunted, development, harvest, granny's toenails and new life.

MEGHAN:

Cool, awesome. So ours are quite different, and I'm going to talk mine through from my favourite word first, to sort of draw a character from or draw something from. So I've got like, snow ice winter, I'd say that's quite cold. Like the general vibe I'm getting from this is like cold, so I'm just gonna write that in a little box beneath.

Something that excites me about this is Great British Bake Off, and from connecting, like crispy is... if you thought of that as a character I would think of that as maybe quite a delicate character, so I'm thinking from this, thinking of maybe someone quite delicate, who was on the Great British Bake Off, was a contestant in the Great British Bake Off, and winter is sort of sticking out to me, is maybe a time of year that this play could take part... take part in? That this play could happen in. So winter, maybe Great British Bake Off contestant who's quite delicate, quite sensitive, maybe they burned their biscuits and they were too crispy, that's why they got kicked off. So that's maybe one character, maybe one sort of season that I've drawn out from my word crispy. So Cathan, sort of applying that logic, what do you have?

CATHAN:

So I'm thinking well, life and new life and circle of life, maybe it's something to do with a baby being born...?

MEGHAN:

Cool yeah, that's a big event, that's good.

CATHAN:

It could be in, possibly in a hospital, I'm gonna write this down... hospital, baby umm, I've got granny's toenails, maybe granny could be there, grannies are very important to help out with new babies.

MEGHAN:

Cool, great. These are just all spitballing and none of this is precious, but it's good for just a kick off sort of ignition point. So now we come to where we might mine to get our second character, or a wee bit more context about how we can create a play from absolutely nothing. So I had belch as my least favourite word of the day. My mind went straight to Homer Simpson, and then went to men and then I was like, Miss Trunchbull from Matilda. I've got sort of smell, gross, rudeness, fizzy drinks, heartburn manners, breath, food, after dinner, heavy, throat, and so from this I'm sort of getting – which might be quite a nice opposite to my potentially delicate character from my favourite word – like quite a rude, sort of gross individual. And already there's a contrast, so I've got quite a delicate person and quite a gross, sort of rude individual. That to me feels like a good, potentially watchable contrast.

Food keeps coming up in both of these and so it's gotta be something like a dinner, or an after dinner. Because belch is like an after-dinner thing, and I'm thinking if my favourite word of the day crispy, if my person, this delicate individual who is a baker, there could be some... maybe they've like joined another baking competition, but the judge of it is this quite rude, gross, smelly, horrible individual. Yeah, maybe that's it. So I'm just going to write that down. Cathan what was your least favorite word of the day?

CATHAN:

So mine was swelter, from that I had moist, boiling, hot, hot under the collar, sweaty, anxiety, uncomfortable, need to get out, claustrophobic, unbearable, hard to handle... so that could be potentially the father of the baby, who is not dealing very well with the process of childbirth, getting very hot, sweaty. Or it could be, it could be possibly someone that's there, maybe the uncomfortable part is from the mother, who knows that the person who's there as the father is not in fact the father of the baby!

MEGHAN:

Good! Good. So that's just from two words. We've come up with these situations, these potential settings, these potential characters from just two words. And whatever you get now, stick with and keep pushing on with. And what I would say about setting or characters, and this is from someone whose last play was set in a kitchen, so like it's not the most interesting setting in the world. But if you can pick a more interesting setting, so like a baking competition, like a public baking competition to me sounds like something I've not really seen on stage before, or would maybe like to see on stage. And a hospital room is a really good idea.

CATHAN:

I haven't often seen that actually.

MEGHAN:

So this has just come from these two words, our favourite word of the day, our least favourite word of the day. And now if we move on to like some potential themes, my themes can come and go. I guess the trick with themes is to think about what makes you angry or excited or passionate. So I mean a big one for me is misogyny. Which could tie in really well and this is like, quite a delicate woman who's had to be confronted by this quite gross judge for this baking competition. That's an interesting dynamic and that makes me angry, makes me passionate. And what about you?

CATHAN:

I'm trying to think... the theme of umm... What's the word when you're true to a partner?

MEGHAN:

Loyalty?

CATHAN:

Well loyalty, yes, and well, yeah I guess loyalty. And whether there has been or hasn't been loyalty, there's just so many ways you can play with it I guess. Uh, loyalty and... lies?

MEGHAN:

Loyalty and lies! Two big'uns. Good. So from there, if you get passionate about it it'll sort of fuel your writing. So what I will say is we're coming to the end of our first workshop now, keep a hold of these. I would say don't look at them again. Your brain will sort of mull over whatever logical sort of conclusions you've come to, to do with potential characters, potential settings, potential themes. And then next week we're going to take wherever we left off with our characters and move from there. We're going to say goodbye to you now, so say goodbye to them.

CATHAN:

Goodbye!

MEGHAN:

And you'll see Cathan again next week! Thanks guys, thank you so much for watching the first episode of 'Anyone Can Write a Play,' which is part of the Traverse Theatre's First Stages Festival. If you have any questions please stick them in the comment section below, or tweet @traversetheatre and we'll help you out. If you have any questions for me you can tweet at my twitter handle and I'll work on some things to help you guys out in the next couple weeks.

If you're looking for more opportunities to develop your playwriting please check out the 'Get Involved' section on the Traverse website, where there's a ton of resources that can help you out, and you can also sign up to their digital newsletter to hear more about opportunities and what they've got coming up. There's some really cool tasty things in the new Traverse 3 online play place!

And lastly if you'd like to help the Traverse continue to do the brilliant work they do then you can make a donation and find out more about supporting the Traverse on their website. Thank you so much for joining me for 'Anyone Can Write a Play,' and keep mulling and we'll see you next week.

[♪ Upbeat electronic music. AUDIO ENDS]