**Transcription**
**Anyone Can Write a Play, Episode 3 – Meghan Tyler**

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

[♪ Upbeat electronic music]

MEGHAN TYLER:

Hello my name is Meghan Tyler, and this is Cathan McRoberts and welcome to episode three of Anyone Can Write a Play as part of the Traverse Theatre's First Stages Festival. I just want to say thank you so much for doing the last two workshops and for going on this journey with us. I'm aware that I'm finding this time really difficult and a real struggle to feel creative and so I just want to take a wee moment for us all to just, for you guys to commend yourselves and give yourself a wee pat on the back and for committing to being creative when the world is a bit wild at the moment.

Great. So this would be a good time to do the Seven I's exercise if you haven't done so already. If you have done so already, we can continue to rock and roll. If you haven't done so already, we'll do what we did last week, which is just you'll stop the video, set a minute timer for each header that we've covered and do a minute on each one to clear your minds. Awesome, so once you've done that we'll get started.

So this week we're going to look at the structure of plays, we're going to look at dialogue and we're going to look at plot. Before we do that, this would be a really good moment I think just to take a moment, take what we've already compiled, so get your notebooks or whatever you've used to flesh out your characters and stuff, and I just want you to take a little moment to revisit who you invented. Their wants, their needs, their secrets, so on and so forth. So just take a little moment to look back on that.

And just whenever you're ready, I just want you to take another little moment to think about any other thoughts that you've further mulled on over this past week, your inactive mulling. So for example, I've sort of landed on the fact that I want the story to be a revenge story. I love revenge stories, they excite me so much. So that's something that I've been mulling over the last couple of days. How about you Cathan, you mulled further?

CATHAN MCROBERTS:

I had mulled a lot further, and a lot of those ideas have run away as well, but yeah I mean, I definitely knew that I wanted to be, to do with helping each other to change, I guess.

MEGHAN:

Great, amazing, wonderful. So just take this moment now, another couple of seconds just to sit and reflect on some thoughts or ideas you've had in the last week about your characters and where they could go and what they could do.

Cool. So now we've done that as a little thought exercise, we're going to move on to how

your character speaks and how we approach dialogue. You might be sat at home going 'I can't, I can't write dialogue, no I can't it's too complicated it's too, no I just can't do it.' You can, it's so easy we use dialogue all the time in everyday life. It's just about fine-tuning it to suit for the stage. And we're gonna do an exercise for you guys to be able to do that. So what you're gonna need for this exercise are some scrap bits of paper, I have pre-made ours. Some scrap bits of paper and a pen or a pencil, however you want to write. We're just going to do another little timed exercise that's going to form dialogue. So just take a moment now to go get your spare bits of paper, and then we're ready to rock and roll.

Okay, so now you've got your scrap bits of paper we're going to do a timed exercise. So it's going to take three minutes, so what we're going to do is, do you remember your favourite word? What we're going to do is we're going to take our favourite word, and write it on the top of a scrap bit of paper. So mine was crispy. So take your favourite word and write it on the top of a scrap bit of paper. Okay. And now over the next three minutes, we'll set a timer, over the next three minutes what we're going to do is write three sentences inspired by this word or using this word, as if you would read them in a book. So three sentences using this word or inspired by this word that you would read in a book. Okay, does that make sense?

CATHAN:

So like... and as we saw the such and such within...

MEGHAN:

Yeah.

CATHAN:

So like a novel kind of thing?

MEGHAN:

Yes so I've got crispy so that would be, my first sentence might be something like umm, the gravel, the salt on the pavement made it crispy under my feet. Or it would be like the fat was dripping off the crispy bacon. Or it could have it could just be inspired by that word, like, my biscuits were burnt within an inch of its life. Like that kind of thing. Is that clearer?

CATHAN:

Yes. And you seem to be going down the path of your play a little bit.

MEGHAN:

I know, I shouldn't have done that. But it can happen and that's totally fine. That's totally fine, it's a it's an open exercise. So we'll set a timer now for three minutes, and in three minutes we're going to write three sentences. They don't have to be related, but inspired by your favourite word, or using your favourite word. Okay, we ready?

CATHAN:

Ready ready ready.

MEGHAN:

Okay three minutes starts, now.

Okay cool, so how did you find that?

CATHAN:

Yeah okay.

MEGHAN:

Okay, yeah. So these are my three sentences that I've come up with from crispy. So number one, the fat dripped off the crispy bacon. Number two, pork crackling is a bit crap if it's soft. Number three, the snow under her foot crunched with satisfaction. Cathan, would you like to share your sentences?

CATHAN:

No.

MEGHAN:

Okay. [Laughter]

CATHAN:

So I got: to see the growth over the years was amazing. The garden hadn't been touched in years, and the addition was something that was not welcome.

MEGHAN:

That last one's intriguing. So now just take a moment to look at your three sentences that you've come up with. If you would like to read them out loud, you should and can. And just whenever you're ready, what you're going to do with your scrap bit of paper is fold it up, and you're going to put it away from you.

CATHAN:

Are we going back to it?

MEGHAN:

Perchance you are. So now, second part of this exercise. I want you to take a second scrap of paper, you already got one, I want you to take a second scrap of paper and I want you to once again write your word at the top of the page.

CATHAN:

Same word?

MEGHAN:

Same word. I'm writing crispy at the top of my page. Now without looking at the three sentences you came up with before, what I want you to do now is I want you to write those sentences again, from memory, as if you were saying them out loud. In real time, in the moment. So write those three sentences again as if you yourself were to say them out loud in everyday speech. Okay, is that clear?

CATHAN:

Yeah.

MEGHAN:

Okay great. No questions?

CATHAN:

No questions.

MEGHAN:

Okay great. So do you want to start-

CATHAN:

Am I allowed to ask a question?

MEGHAN:

Of course you're allowed!

CATHAN:

Oh I thought you were like 'no questions!' As in, umm... So if I'd said the growth over the years was amazing, it would be... that is, I don't really...

MEGHAN:

Okay, so for instance my first sentence was um, about the fat dripping off the crispy bacon. And if I were was to translate that into me saying that out loud in real time, it'd be like, 'oh, would you look at the fat dripping off that bacon.'

CATHAN:

Right.

MEGHAN:

Do you understand?

CATHAN:

Yes. I better go before I forget these!

MEGHAN:

Okay you ready to start a timer?

CATHAN:

Oh, flip, yep! Okay, uh, three minute timer...

MEGHAN:

Three minute timer, your three sentences without looking at them, as if you were going to say them out loud. You ready? Three two one, go.

CATHAN:

One minute left.

... four, three, two, one [timer beeps].

MEGHAN:

So sharp! So how did you find that Cathan?

CATHAN:

Good. I didn't remember my second sentence until the very last 30 seconds and I was like, oh got it! So I got back to it, I was very proud actually. I didn't realise my brain worked as well.

MEGHAN:

Well done! So my three sentences that I came up with that I would say out loud, me being me are as follows. Number one, that's a car-load of fat dripping off that bacon. Number two, Jesus Christ the state of this poor cracklin', that is beyond out of date. And number three, ooft that crunch is outrageous.

CATHAN:

Okay well, um... it's amazing to see how that's grown over the years. Have you seen the state of that garden? And, you adding that into this situation is not helpful.

MEGHAN:

Great, amazing. Now this would be the opportune moment for you guys at home to read your sentences out loud. And I just want to highlight something here. So obviously me and Cathan are from the North of Ireland, and we've both used language there from our home. Wee colloquialisms. And I again just want to highlight the strength and importance of having plays that are set all over the place, not just in London or in big, bright cities.

Great, so now what we're going to do is you're going to take this and you're going to fold it up again. And you're going to put it away. You're not going to look at it. And you're going to get another bit of paper, scrap bit of paper. And you're going to once again write your favourite word at the top of the page. And beside that word you're going to write the name of the character that has been inspired by that word. So I'm writing Bridget.

Now what we're going to do this time round, we're going to mimic the exercise that we've just done, when we were putting those sentences into our own words. But now what we're going to do is put those sentences into our character's voice. So think about how your character would say, the equivalent of those sentences out loud. So for example, I'm quite, uh, I would be quite the jokester in my day-to-day life, so saying things like, 'oh there's a car load of it dripping off that bacon,' like that really suits me, whereas I think my character might be slightly dismayed or might be quite disgruntled about hot fat dripping off something in an oven.

So just again, we'll take 30 seconds just to close our eyes and remember that image of the character that you conjured up last week. Just take 30 seconds, close your eyes, see them again. Remember their want, their need, their secret. Open your eyes. So now we'll repeat the exercise. So you've got three minutes to write three sentences, as if your first character from your favourite word were to say these sentences out loud. What would they say? Is that clear?

CATHAN:

Yes.

MEGHAN:

Awesome. So would you set a timer for me? For three minutes.

CATHAN:

Okay, timer for three minutes set, and are we ready?

MEGHAN:

 Yep, let's go.

So just finish off wherever you are. How did you find that, Cathan?

CATHAN:

Really good actually, I thought that was very interesting.

MEGHAN:

What was interesting? Elaborate please.

CATHAN:

Yeah I just felt like I could really see the character saying it, and how differently they would say it. And how, because they've different thoughts than I do, so therefore I was thinking inside of how they would have thought about it, and it came out completely different.

MEGHAN:

Great, amazing, and yeah I'm much the same. Although I've concocted this exercise! [Laughter] But for Bridget, from crispy, my number one is darn it, I need more tinfoil, the bottom of the oven will be a nightmare to clean now. Number two, it's a little soft actually but that's okay, I mean it's not ideal, but it's okay. And number three, Iceland, Norway, the North Pole, somewhere like that. What about you, Cathan?

CATHAN:

So I have, uh, that's incredible to think that started from a little seed. Oh my, someone really needs to show them that little bit of love. And, I really appreciate what you're trying to say, but maybe it would be a bit better to look at it in a different way.

MEGHAN:

Great, amazing, wonderful. So now what I want you to do is, I want you to go back to your little pieces of paper that you have with your other sentences on it, and I want you to open them up, and I just want you to know, like, what stuck with you? What were the words maybe that are in all three versions of your bits of paper? What completely changed? Just look and note the progression that you made from page number one to page number three. Cathan, any reflections?

CATHAN:

Yeah... it seems like almost throughout it, my character coming into it has brought in... action, if you know what I mean, like she needs to do something, about these issues that seem to be arising.

MEGHAN:

Cool. Great. I've noticed that in my first two, I used the word dripping and crackling. There's something in the words that you like, the words that you want to hear on stage. However as soon as it became my character, I discovered that they're much more rooted in people-pleasing, and they're a bit a worrier. So great, that was a great exercise. We're going to redo this exercise now with our second character. But before we do that, it's always good to give your fingers when you're writing, just a little bit of blood. And just to stretch out your wee wrists. Oh that was a crack!

CATHAN:

That was a crack and a half!

MEGHAN:

And just give yourself a little bit of a stretch. Because it can be quite taxing on the body, this old writing malarkey. Great, so well done guys, now we're going to move on to our second character. Okay so three more scrap pieces of paper, and we're going to just repeat the exercise again. So write your least favourite word on the top of your first scrap bit of paper. So mine was belch. And we'll spend the next three minutes coming up with three sentences inspired by, or using, your least favourite word, as if they were to be read in a novel, as if you were to read them. So Cathan, can you set the timer please? Three minutes. Ready?

24 seconds to go!

Okay. Well done well done! So from belch, my three novel-esque sentences are as follows. Number one, to her horror, the stench invaded her personal space so monstrously that she gagged. Number two, the fizz of his carbonated beverage overwhelmed his chest. Number three, don't know where this came from but you gotta just go with it sometimes, number three, the question remained - dogs can fart, but can they belch? What about you?

CATHAN:

So I have, the heat in the office was unbearable. As the nerves increased, so did the sweat soaking his shirt. They needed to get out of there. It's from swelter.

MEGHAN:

Swelter, swelter that horrible word. Amazing. So now just take a wee moment to read out your three sentences that you have created… Wonderful, and now you're going to fold it up,

and put it away again.

Number two of this exercise. So once again, you're gonna get three minutes, based off your least favourite word that you came up with, you're going to write three sentences, as if you were to speak them out loud in real time. Okay, all gravy? All gravy. Okay so, oh can you start the timer?

CATHAN:

Yeah okay, three minutes. Three, two, one!

30 seconds left.

MEGHAN:

Time! Wonderful. So for belch these are my three sentences as if I were to say them out loud.

Jesus Christ, what the hell did you eat, like I have a pure phobia of eggs. Number two, made you gassy. Number three, dogs must be able to fart or, wait no google it, like do they have that reflex though? Cathan what about you?

CATHAN:

Umm, I got... it's bloody roasting in there. There's really getting to me here, I'm soaked, and I can't stand it in here anymore.

MEGHAN:

Great, wonderful. this is now your opportunity to look and say your three sentences, and whenever you're ready take your piece of paper and fold it up and put it away. Now we come to the juicy third piece of paper. So write your least favourite word at the top of the page once again, and write your character name beside that word, and we're going to write three sentences as if this character were to speak. So once again, let's close our eyes for a couple of seconds, and just imagine that character that's come from your least favourite word.

Okay and open your eyes.

We'll set the timer and once again we've got three minutes to write three sentences, as if your character from your least favourite word would be speaking about the topic of each sentence, out loud. Okay so, three, two, one, go.

20 seconds left.

Boom town. Great, so from belch for Harvey. Number one, no you know I do enjoy a deviled egg, yes I find them instantly compelling. Number two, pardon me, I don't tend to revel in carbonated drinks unless champers is on the table. I don't think I like Harvey very much. Number three, no no I once owned a bloodhound who could belch on cue. Cathan?

CATHAN:

So I got swelter with Milo. I've got flip me that's something else in there, I'm sweltered. Sorry I'm a little nervous, I don't usually perspire this much, and sorry I really hate to ask but do you mind if I could be excused for a moment?

MEGHAN:

Okay great. This is your opportunity to look at your three sentences and to say them out loud.

Wonderful, and once you've done that, again just take your pieces of hidden paper from before, and notice the similarities, notice the differences. Okay, do you have any reflections?

CATHAN:

It's interesting, whenever I have started, just obviously statements kind of like narrated, and then when it gets to me it's kind of a little bit brash, but when it gets to Milo he's so apologetic, I would be more likely to just say something, whereas he's very much like I really hate to but, you know, but do you mind if I...?

MEGHAN:

Doesn't want to take up space.

CATHAN:

Yeah, yeah.

MEGHAN:

Yeah it's interesting for Harvey, What I've noticed is something that... So I actually have a phobia of eggs, and because he feels quite grotesque and he's from Oxford, those differences in the two characters, that the fact that he enjoys deviled eggs so much, it's just setting up a nice sort of worlds apart from me and who I am. And also he's just coming out as quite a posh bloke. So just take a wee moment to reflect. And once you've done that we'll move on and chuck our characters into a writing exercise together.

Okay so for this next exercise you need your notepad and a pen or if you prefer to write on a laptop, once again just however you work, do that. So this is going to be a little exercise to crack open the dialogue question. So I want you to write the names of your characters at the top of the page. And I want, this is the situation that I'm proposing to you. We're going to spend five minutes writing this little short scene which is just an exercise, it's not precious, it's all about letting things go and just testing things out as an experiment. So what we're going to do is we're going to spend five minutes writing off the following brief. So your first character is sat in a chair. Your second character wants to sit in that chair, but can't outrightly ask them to get out of the chair. Okay? Do I need to elaborate on anything Cathan?

CATHAN:

So one's already in it, the other wants to be in it?

MEGHAN:

Yes.

CATHAN:

How do we decide who's who?

MEGHAN:

I'm just putting my character inspired by my first word, by my favourite word, crispy, so I'm putting Bridget in the chair. And I am putting Harvey as the person who's trying to get into the chair. Okay? It's an exercise in how that might unfold. We're just fleshing out our characters, finding more about our characters with this exercise. Okay? And there's something here in what they can and can't say, so the rule is your second character can't outrightly ask to sit in the chair, so how do they go about getting into the chair? And how does your first character respond to that?

CATHAN:

They both want to be in the chair?

MEGHAN:

They both want to be in the chair.

CATHAN:

Can you take the chair back?

MEGHAN:

What do you mean take the chair back?

CATHAN:

Like if, say your second character takes the chair from the first character, does the first character have the opportunity to get the chair back?

MEGHAN:

If you can do all that journey in five minutes then sure. It's totally up to you if they're successful or not, it's totally up to you if they fall into a sort of rotation, but of who's sitting in a chair. But I would say the dramatic tension comes from them both wanting the same thing, and one of them not being allowed to outright ask. So how do they go about getting into the chair? How does the other one pick up that they want the chair? Do they... does it get physical? It's just it's an exercise and how this might go with our two characters.

CATHAN:

And you're looking for dialogue as opposed to stage directions?

MEGHAN:

Yeah looking for dialogue as opposed to stage directions. So if me as Meghan wanted to get you as Cathan out of the chair but you didn't want to move from the chair and I didn't want to outrightly ask, is it a case of being like, of using a tactic like oh my legs are so sore. Or is it a case of there's someone at the door, you need to go answer it? Like how, what is it? Do you know what I mean?

CATHAN:

If it's really good food somewhere I'd come running.

MEGHAN:

I'll keep that in mind, if I ever have to get you out of my chair. Okay so we're gonna spend five

minutes on this. So your first character is in a chair, your second character wants to be in that

chair, your second character is going to try to get into the chair without outrightly asking your first character to get out of the chair. Okay? So five minutes on this exercise.

CATHAN:

Let's go!

MEGHAN:

Okay.

Got one minute left.

Ten more seconds, just finish off wherever you are. [Alarm beeps] and that's time. Okay cool, well done. You're writing dialogue! Pat yourself on the back again. So let's just take a little moment to just take a wee glance over what we've written and to just reflect. So my character Harvey, I've discovered he speaks a lot, he speaks in quite long sentences. My character Bridget is quite shy, and speaks in quite little sentences but there is something there, she hasn't given up the chair yet. She's just sort of trying to end the conversation as time goes on. But it opens with Harvey being like, oh is that an original Italian piece? And trying to sort of... there's definitely an imposition of him playing a power game of I am smarter than you and I know more things about you, that I know more than you and I am more cultured than you, and that has come out of this. And Cathan what about you, any sort of reflections?

CATHAN:

Yeah well, Milo is quite similar in the respect of not really saying very much, similar to Bridget I guess. He says as much as he needs to say and no more really. The only time he really said anything was saying that he hoped it wasn't too long to wait, because that was his way of maybe hinting that he wanted the chair. And Summer is very much about, I want to know who you are, I want to be kind but also I want to stay in this chair. So I want you to know that I wish there was another chair for you, but I'm staying in this chair!

MEGHAN:

I really like that self battle, like I want to be nice but I also want to sit in the chair. Like it's quite nice to have a self battle with your characters. So just some things to probe, some things to question, looking back over your piece... The language that you've started using for your characters, so for example Harvey is quite flowery in his language, he thinks he's using clever words but he's not really. Bridget is quite sort of, meek, and quite quiet and blunt with her language. But then she has little moments of being quite sharp. Harvey's sentence structures are quite long, he sort of goes on a bit, and Bridget's are a lot shorter.

And what's going to be interesting with that from this exercise is that's always fun to play with. So what I like to do with a two-hander with characters is, through over the course of a play, they almost switch, like there's something in them that they do the opposite of what they did at the start of the play. So maybe by the end of this play, Bridget is the one speaking in extremely long, eloquent sentences and Harvey doesn't say very much at all. And how do we get from where we start off with them to there? Which is going to be great because we're just about to talk about that.

We're now going to move on. I'm going to talk a little bit about structure, I'm going to talk about beginnings, endings, that sort of chunk in the middle. So give yourself a little shake and we'll get on with it.

Okay so, let's talk about structure and plot and all those very big scary words. It's not scary at all. Basically, a story sort of follows that beginning, middle, end kind of framework, and one thing that I find really really useful to think about, and we're going to do this as an exercise, is Pixar's story structure, how Pixar approach plays. Not plays, they approach cartoons, we're

approaching plays! And this is how this is framed. So once again you need your notebook and a pen, and I want you to write the following, I'm gonna read out the following and I want you to write it down.

So... once upon a time there was, and leave a blank space.

CATHAN:

How much space?

MEGHAN:

Just like a blank, I've written it like that. So once upon a time there was, and there's a blank space for me to continue, and full stop. So once upon a time there was... full stop.

Every day, another blank space, full stop.

Until one day, and another blank space, full stop.

Because of that, blank space.

Because of that, blank space.

CATHAN:

Oh again because of that?

MEGHAN:

Yeah so two because of that, so at the moment you should have once upon a time there was, blank space. Every day, blank space, until one day blank space. Because of that, blank space, and because of that, blank space, until finally... Until finally, blank space. And ever since that day, blank space.

So I'll read that out one more time. Once upon a time there was... every day... until one day... because of that... because of that... until finally... And ever since that day...

So I just want to read a wee bit more information and context, from the people who... it's a bit of a wonder where this structure came from, who first invented this structure, but Pixar used this. But this is what there is to be said about this structure. So, once upon a time. Whether you use these exact words or not, this opening reminds us that our first responsibility as storytellers is to introduce our characters and setting, i.e. to fix the story in time and space. Instinctively your audience wants to know, who is the story about, where are they and when is all this taking place? You don't have to provide every detail but you must supply enough information so the audience has everything they need to know to understand the story that is to follow. So your once upon a time, mine would be: once upon a time there was a failed baker called Bridget. Okay?

And every day, so the second part, and every day. With characters and setting established, you can begin to tell the audience what life is like in this world every day. The Wizard of Oz, for example, the opening scenes established that Dorothy feels ignored unloved and dreams of a better place over the rainbow This is Dorothy's world in balance, and don't be confused

by the term balance, it does not imply all is well, only that this is how things are. So how has life been? What is regular everyday life? That is what the balance of the characters is.

So until one day. The until one day of this is, people talk about that exciting incident, like the gun comes out, or you see a gun, and you then know a gun's going to be used. And so until one day, something happens that throws the main character's world out of balance, forcing them to do something, change something, attain something, that will either restore the old balance or establish a new equilibrium. In story structure this moment is referred to as the inciting incident, and it is the pivotal event that launches the story. In the Wizard of Oz, the tornado provides the inciting incident by apparently transporting Dorothy far, far away from home. So in the Wizard of Oz, the tornado is the inciting incident.

And because of this, your main character or protagonist begins the pursuit of his or her goal. In structural terms, this is the beginning of act two, technically. The main body of the story. So for example after being literally dropped into the land of Oz, Dorothy desperately wants to return home, but is told that the only person who can help her lives far away, so she must journey by foot to the Emerald City to meet a mysterious wizard. Along the way she will encounter several obstacles: apple-throwing trees, flying monkeys etc. But these only make the narrative more interesting.

And so then we move on to the second 'and because of this.' Dorothy achieves her first objective, meeting the Wizard of Oz. But this is not the end of her story. Because of this meeting, she now has another objective: kill the Wicked Witch of the West and deliver her broomstick to the wizard. In shorter stories, you may have only one 'because of this,' but you need at least one. So I tend to, even though we're only doing like a 20 minute piece, I tend to like a couple of 'because of this,' because I feel like the more obstacles, and the more actions, creates better plays.

Until finally, we enter act three and approach the story's moment of truth. Dorothy succeeds in her task and presents the wizard with the deceased witch's broom, so now he must make good in his promise to help return her to Kansas. And this he does, but not quite in the way we initially expect.

The end - and ever since that day. Once we know what has happened, the closing scenes tell us what the story means for the protagonist, for others in the narrative, and not least of all for those of us in the audience. When Dorothy awakens in her own bed and realises she never actually left Kansas, she learns the lesson of the story: what we're looking for is often inside us all along.

So that's a breakdown, very helpfully on the interweb, of how your story works. So what we're going to do now is we're going to spend three minutes writing this out. So, once upon a time there was blank. Every day, blank. Until one day, blank. Because of that, blank. Because of that, blank. Until finally, blank. And ever since that day, blank. Okay?

CATHAN:

Okay.

MEGHAN:

So we're going to spend three minutes now doing this exercise. Can you set another timer for me please? So really think about your story, your characters, that little exercise we did about dialogue, and just let that feed into this. So, once upon a time there was, story structure.

Go.

About 40 seconds left.

Okay well done. How did you find that?

CATHAN:

Not good.

MEGHAN:

Not good. It is hard. But can I talk you through mine?

CATHAN:

Yes.

MEGHAN:

Okay, once upon a time there was a failed baker named Bridget. Every day, she felt the weight of her failure on her shoulders. Until one day, a baking competition came to town, with a famous judge that she knew from culinary school. Because of that, she entered the competition. Because of that, she learned he had been the one who ruined her career, until finally, she poisoned him with her biscuits. And ever since that day, she has felt all-powerful and realised her true potential.

CATHAN:

Wow.

MEGHAN:

So based off that example, you said that you struggled with that? Okay. So, what we'll do now is we'll pause this video. If you find that you struggled a wee bit, after that example, just take another three minutes to have another bash at it. Okay? Cool. And if not, continue on with the video.

Okay so Cathan, you struggled with the middle of that exercise. With the 'because of that' and 'because of that,' which is totally, absolutely fine. Because to be honest, we're just at the beginnings of our story anyway, but sometimes that exercise can be really good to discover what the story could be. However, to help facilitate that, what we're going to do is a little exercise on endings. I like to call it the 10 what ifs.

So how this exercise works is, again, I'm going to set a three minute timer and you're going to write 10 potential endings for your two characters. So for example, for Harvey and Bridget, they fall in love at the end of the play. She poisons him and takes back her career. An asteroid hits the baking competition... What else could there be? You're just spit balling some potential endings, and they can range from like as small and simple and as neatly rounded up as you like, or they can be as large and ridiculous as you want. And I find if you've got a couple of mad ones in there, it's always brilliant, you can always find some really exciting stuff, with the sort of bigger endings of stuff, of plays.

So we're going to do the 10 what ifs exercise. So what ifs, just 10 potential story endings for your characters, and they don't have to be precious, they don't have to be right. They might change, they probably will change as time goes on, but it's just ten spitball potential endings. Okay? So three minutes, ten what ifs exercise. What if this happened with them, what if that happened with them, what if everyone dies at the end, what if it was all a dream? Don't do the it was all the dream one, we've done that a lot. Okay so you ready? 10 what ifs, starting from now.

Just finish off whatever one you're on, because you've got about five seconds.

[Alarm beeps] Time! Wonderful. And how did you find that Cathan?

CATHAN:

Yeah better.

MEGHAN:

Better? Good. I've basically got my 10. Well, I didn't get to 10, I got to 9, but my what ifs involve: what if she poisoned him? What if they got married? What if he wins the day? What if she wins the day? What if they kill each other? What if they are both publicly shamed and cancelled? What if she cooks him? I've already done that with Crocodile Fever, so probably won't do that again. What if she physically, she physically uses face-off technology to take his identity? Who knows? Cathan what are some potential spitball endings?

CATHAN:

What if Summer and Milo fall in love? What if Summer enables Milo to see his potential, and he becomes the head of the DUP? What if Milo becomes overconfident? What if Summer realises she can't help Milo? What if Summer realises she's the one that needs help? What if Summer makes Milo see his potential, and he actually falls in love? And that's all I got.

MEGHAN:

Amazing. Well now what I want you to do is, I want you to reflect on your ten what ifs, or however many you came up with. And I want you to pick the one that excites you the most.

CATHAN:

Yeah I know which one that is for me.

MEGHAN:

What is that one?

CATHAN:

Summer enables Milo to see his potential and he becomes the head of the DUP [laughter].

MEGHAN:

You can do that in 20 minutes?! I'm sort of, what if she poisoned him? I'm sort of leaning towards that one.

Wonderful, so from that if you struggled with the last exercise, then it's a case of, until finally, that's where you would write your potential ending. And then it's just about filling in the meat between those different parts. So your 'because of that' kind of parts. Yeah? That all doesn't have to come today. It might be something that you stumble upon with your brains over the course of the next couple of days. So on that, about filling in the middle, the middle of a play is where the change in characters happens.

So your characters should go on a journey as your play goes on, and I find because we're doing a 20 minute short play, setting a time limit will always provide much more fruitful content and work. So if I think about what could be 20 minutes in relation to my play, it's 20 minutes until she has to show her biscuits, they have to be ready in 20 minutes. And Cathan, if you were to think about a time pressure, 20 minutes that you put on your play, it could be that there's another meeting that needs to happen, or that the building is closing down in 20 minutes. Just think about a time pressure that relates to the world of your characters, of the situation that you might put them in.

And so on that, we're coming to a close of our first workshop - our third workshop, what am I on about! But I just, in case you're sat at home like I don't know where this could go, I'm a bit confused, I'm a bit perplexed, here's just a little thought exercise for you. So I want you to think of something like a film or tv show, or a piece of theatre that you saw and you absolutely adored, you absolutely loved. What excited you about it? What made you leave and go, oh I could watch that again, watch that million times over? Let the things that you loved propel you forward in your plays.

And I would say think of a play that you went to see, or film you want to see or tv show you

went to see that you absolutely hated, and do the opposite of whatever that play did. And there you should find what your middle is. And on that I'd say, it is just about bashing it out now, and between now and when we meet I'd love for you guys to have had a go at a first draft. That's about 15 pages for a 20-minute play. The rule is sort of like a minute and a half is the length of a page of script.

And I just to want to drop into your minds that the opening should be something that instantly intrigues the audience. So for example, an opening that I might think of for my play is that she could, maybe the biscuits are too hot, and she burns herself, and that also alludes to danger, that also alludes to things going a bit wrong, that also alludes to her own failures. But it's quite a loud thing that an audience would clock into. So just have a think about what's like a sparky opening, and aim for your what if ending, and it should just fall into place.

On that, I would say work to music, write to music. So I'd say things that are like 114 bpm like strut music, like Sexy Back or club music, things like that, they really help facilitate writing. Or pick music that is related to your play idea. So I've got my character Harvey's quite posh, I think maybe I'll be listening to some classical. But also I think it's going to be quite a feminist piece that I'm writing, so I'm gonna be listening to like some proper punk women as I'm writing too. I'm just gonna mix it up a bit and let the music sort of fuel me. Does that make sense?

CATHAN:

Oh yeah.

MEGHAN:

Oh yeah. Cool so before we say goodbye I just want to say, for you guys filling your middle, this is some tips that Gary McNair gave me to give to my students, a number of years ago. And I think that the tips are just timeless. So here are Gary McNair's tips for writing.

Put down the words you want to say out loud.

Number two, trust your own rhythms and let them push you.

Number three, validity. You have the same right to metaphor and language as anyone else. You are a writer.

Just look over that once upon a time exercise, bash it out within half an hour, it does not, it's not going to be good. First drafts are never good, first drafts are when you're just uncovering things and discovering things. I like to call them draft zero instead of draft one, because it takes the pressure off, because you're just literally chucking shit at a wall. And the thing is, you can't get gold, something can't grow unless you bury it in shit, unless you start with shit. So you need to start with shit for things to grow from there. So don't hate yourself, don't be overthinking, don't be approaching every sentence with what am I doing? Just ask what would my character say back to that as a response? What would my character say next? Why would they say that now? Just follow that pattern until you start to find your way to an end. It's not going to be perfect and that's okay. We'll get to how to make it perfect later.

So thank you so much for joining us again, and again if you have any questions, hit me up on the social medias and I hope you have a lovely rest of your week. And just bash the play out. Okay, bye guys.