**Playwriting Unit**

by Jennifer Ansted

**Unit Objective:**

Students will demonstrate an ability to create an original story with believable characters and dialogue by writing and revising an original ten-minute scene.

**Learning Level:**

Beginning

**Prior Experience:**

Students should be familiar with plot structure

**Big Idea:**

Listening

**Enduring Understandings:**

**Responding:** Theatre artists can pay attention to how people sound when they talk and how people really interact and resolve conflicts.

**Creating:** Theatre artists can recreate human interaction in a natural and organic way.

**Connecting:** Theatre artists can connect what they create to their own lives.

**Essential Questions:**

**Responding:** How do people sound when they communicate?

**Creating:** How can I recreate organic human interactions in a very inorganic atmosphere?

**Connecting:** How does what I create teach me things about my own life? What can I learn as a theatre artist?

**Standards:**

TH:Cn10.1.I - Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas, and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re7.1.8 - Apply criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cn10.1.8 - Examine a community issue through multiple perspectives in a drama work.

TH:Cr3.1.8 - Use repetition and analysis in order to revise devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr3.1.I - Practice and revise a devised or scripted drama/theatre work using theatrical staging conventions.

TH:Re8.1.8c - Apply personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs to evaluate a drama/theatre work.

**Key Knowledge and Skills:**

-Understanding and implementation of repetition, exposition, subtext, and logic in creative writing.

-Understanding of how to format a theatre script.

-Making meaningful revisions based on criteria and feedback.

-Thinking critically and writing about relevant issues or topics.

-Understanding of and utilizing the elements of a plot in creating their plays.

**Lessons:**

**Lesson 1: Intro to Playwriting**

**Lesson Objective**: Students will demonstrate their understanding of plot structure by participating in a pre-assessment activity. They will also demonstrate their understanding of the difference in storytelling and in formatting between a short story and a play by transforming existing stories into plays in small groups.

**Lesson 2: Dialogue**

**Lesson Objective:** Students will demonstrate their ability to analyze dialogue and decide what they think makes dialogue effective by analyzing existing film clips and their own homework assignments based on certain criteria.

**Lesson 3: Getting Ideas**

**Lesson Objective:** Students will demonstrate an ability to brainstorm story ideas relevant to their personal belief system or their community by participating in classroom activities.

**Lesson 4: Plot and Dialogue**

**Lesson Objective**: Students will demonstrate their ability to revise their own work by writing and revising part of their ten minute scenes in class.

**Lesson 5: Characters and Relationships**

**Lesson Objective:** Students will demonstrate their ability to establish relationships in dialogue by revising their scripts in class.

**Lesson 6: Dramatic Readings**

**Lesson Objective:** Students will be able to discern what works and does not work in a dramatic piece by reading and evaluating their own scripts and those of their peers during dramatic readings.

**Lesson 1: Intro to Playwriting**

**Lesson Objective**: Students will demonstrate their understanding of plot structure by participating in a pre-assessment activity. They will also demonstrate their understanding of the difference in storytelling and in formatting between a short story and a play by transforming existing stories into plays in small groups.

**Standards:**

TH:Cn10.1.I - Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas, and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work.

**Hook:**

Divide students into four groups by having them count off. Have each group move to a designated place in the room. Go around to each group and assign them one of the following four parts of the Plot Structure: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action/Denouement. Explain the activity to the students like this:

You will be telling the story of *Cinderella* as a class. Each group has a part of that story that they will tell. Write down your group's best storytelling of ONLY the part of the story you are assigned. For example, If this were the story of *Frozen*, the group that has Exposition might say something like, "There was once a faraway kingdom where two young princesses lived happily with their mother and father in their beautiful castle. They loved to eat and swim and dance. But most of all they loved to play with ice. Elsa, the oldest princess, had the special ability to create and manipulate snow and ice. They spent hours building snowmen until one day, Elsa accidentally hurt her sister Anna with a ball of ice. To save Anna, her family took her to some trolls who wiped her memory and healed her. Because her family was scared that Elsa might hurt someone else, they taught her to conceal her powers from everyone, even her sister, and to never use them. Over the years and through the death of their parents, Anna and Elsa grew apart because of this secret."

Emphasize that they can have fun with this and make it detailed like the example above.

**Step 2:**

Once students have had some time to plan, have them gather their groups in a line in the order they will be telling their story. Let them know that it's okay if their interpretation of the story or what parts of the story fit into their elements is different from everyone else's. They don't have to change what they wrote, even if the pieces don't fit together perfectly. Encourage them to just have fun and enjoy moments where it doesn't quite fit together right.

**Step 3:**

Draw a plot diagram on the board.

What is this? (They may call it a plot triangle or the plot structure)

Why is this important to understand as a writer?

How can this help us create interesting stories?

**Step 4:**

*Pair Share*

If basic plot elements can make a story interesting, what makes a story meaningful? What’s the point of telling stories or doing theatre? Think about the books, the plays, the movies you have seen that changed you, made you feel something, or made you think. Turn to a partner and discuss what made that story or that work meaningful to you.

**Step 5:**

Share with the students why YOU as a teacher are passionate about theatre. What makes it meaningful for you? Share a specific example of something you have learned or changed in your life because of something someone wrote or performed.

**Step 6:**

Have students think quietly to themselves for a moment. Have them think of the book, play, movie, tv show, poem, song, etc that has had a great impact on them that they discussed with their partner earlier. Ask them to reflect for a moment on why they like that particular work and how it affected them or what it taught them. Ask them, if they can, to synthesize that reason into a short life lesson or theme. When they are ready, they may come write those themes or life lessons on the board. This may need to be modeled for them. Write on the board, “Sometimes all we have to do is listen” and “we should celebrate our differences” and “Feminism is for everybody” or any other example theme or idea.

**Step 7:**

Words are powerful. Words written for the stage have an extra power to come to life that can teach us and inspire us. If we want to learn to share our voice and say what the world needs to hear from us, we need to study a few things first. Next time we are going to talk about dialogue.

**Assign Homework:** Students must record at least 40 seconds of a natural conversation. This can be at the dinner table, at the mall, at lunch at school. They must then transcribe that dialogue into the format of a play.

**Lesson 2: Dialogue**

**Lesson Objective:** Students will demonstrate their ability to analyze dialogue and decide what they think makes dialogue effective by analyzing existing film clips and their own homework assignments based on certain criteria.

**Standards:**

TH:Re7.1.8 - Apply criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

**Materials Needed:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-K-qR_y8N4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kUxH5QFf7w> until minute 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7131IkiSCg> edited at minute 1:46 for language (another clip may be used if necessary)

Final Assignment Sheet

Script Writing Tips Handout

**Hook:**

Watch “Gilmore Girls” fight, “The King’s Speech” clip, and “Boyhood” haircut clips.

*Discussion:*

Do the lines give enough information to understand the scene? Too much?

What do the lines tell us about character relationships?

Was it engaging?

Did we understand things about the scene and about characters that were not explicitly stated in the dialogue? How did we understand those things without them telling us?

Does the interaction feel true to life? Why or why not?

**Step 1:**

Pass out Script Writing Tips worksheet.

Have students volunteer to read a point and then discuss this point as a class, referring back to the clips we just watched if necessary.

**Step 2:**

Have students get out their conversation dialogue homework, find a partner, and share the dialogue piece they recorded and wrote down. Have them discuss in their partnerships how the real life conversations they observed use exposition, subtext, logic, and if they feel true to life.

**Step 3:**

Come together as a class and ask pairs to share their observations. Talk about ways real life dialogue might need to be changed to be more engaging. For example, real dialogue often doesn’t give the exposition an audience member would need to understand. Real dialogue often doesn’t make sense because as humans we tend to ramble and repeat ourselves.

**Step 4:**

Pass out Final Assignment sheet and go over expectations, due dates and questions. For the remainder of class, have students begin brainstorming ideas. Go around and check on student progress, helping them with ideas and questions.

**Playwriting Assignment Description Sheet**

**Rough Draft Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Final Draft Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Write an 8-10 minute play.**

A good 8-10 minute play is not a sketch or an extended gag, but rather a complete, compact play, with a beginning, middle and end. You will be graded on three things:

1. Formatting (15 points):
   1. Length (8-10 minutes) – When I read the play aloud to myself, it should be within the time limit. I will use my brain and your stage directions to take appropriate pauses for action sequences or wordless parts of the scene. A helpful tip is that a play usually takes up about a minute per page when performed.
   2. Typed with Title and Author’s Name – The play needs to be typed. Let me know individually if this is not possible for you. The title of the play and the name of the author (your name) needs to be at the top of each page of your script. This is easily accomplished through a header.
   3. Consistency – However you format your play, it should look like a play. It should be clear to the reader who is talking. It should be easy to differentiate dialogue from stage directions. Most of all, BE CONSISTENT. If you decide you will write your character names like **THIS:**, write their names that way throughout the script. If your stage directions *(look like this)*, they should look that way throughout the script.
2. Plot Structure (15points):
   1. Plot Diagram – Your play should follow a clear plot structure. You must complete a detailed plot diagram of your play. You may draw your own diagram, print one online, or ask me for a blank one you can use.
3. Dialogue (15 points):
   1. You will be graded on the appropriate use of Exposition, Subtext, Logic, and how True to Life your dialogue feels. Use your Script Writing Tips worksheet as a reference.

**SCRIPT WRITING TIPS**

**EXPOSITION:**

*"One of the tricks is to have the exposition conveyed in a scene of conflict, so that a character is forced to say things you want the audience to know. As, for example, if he is defending himself against somebody’s attack, his words or defense seem justified even though his words are actually expository words. Something appears to be happening, so the audience believes it is witnessing a scene (which it is), not listening to expository speeches.”* - Ernest Lehman

1. Eliminate exposition that isn’t absolutely necessary or that will become clear as [the story](http://thescriptlab.com/screenwriting/story) moves forward.

2. Deliver exposition through conflict or humor.

**SUBTEXT:**

The subtext is all the content underneath that is not announced explicitly by characters but is understood by the readers of viewers.

1. Avoid repetition. If the line is well written and clear, the audience will understand!
2. Use stage directions and design elements to create subtext. Look at the difference between the following two examples:
   1. **Husband:** “You okay, honey?”

**Wife:** “No.”

**Husband:** “What’s wrong?”

**Wife:** “I think you’re having an affair and you forgot our anniversary.”

b. *(A husband comes home late. His hair is tousled and he has lipstick on his collar. He stumbles into the kitchen where his wife is washing dishes angrily.)*

**Husband:** “You okay honey?

**Wife:** I’m fine! *(she slams the dish down and storms out of the room)*

*(Husband sees on the dinner table a card and a present. He picks up the card which reads “Happy Anniversary!”)*

**LOGIC:**

Make sure the world you have created makes sense.

1. Don’t ignore important details. If it doesn’t make sense to you, it won’t make sense to the audience.
2. Make sure your audience knows what is going on! Just because it makes sense to you, doesn’t mean it will make sense to them!

**TRUE TO LIFE:**

This is a tricky balance. Dialogue does not have to be exactly like a real conversation with every like, um, and redundancy. But it should feel real and sound like something your character would say.

1. Avoid using a lot of idiomatic phrases and clichés.
2. Avoid being “corny.” Try saying lines aloud and you will hear when it sounds uncomfortable or unnatural.

**Lesson 3: Getting Ideas**

**Lesson Objective:** Students will demonstrate an ability to brainstorm story ideas relevant to their personal belief system or their community by participating in classroom activities.

**Standards:**

TH:Cn10.1.8 - Examine a community issue through multiple perspectives in a drama work.

**Materials Needed:**



**“The Problem We All Live With” by Norman Rockwell**

**Hook:**

Show students the Norman Rockwell painting on the projector. Ask them to please be sensitive and respectful as we are talking about a historical event and a real person and an issue that affects our country and its citizens today. Give a quick history of the painting (Ruby Bridges was six when her school in New Orleans finally integrated and allowed her to attend a previously all white school. This is Norman Rockwell’s depiction of her long walk into the school, protected by four guards.) Ask students to write a short scene inspired by this painting. This can be Ruby’s inner monologue, it can be her talking to herself or the audience. It can include dialogue from the guards or from the onlooking crowd that was booing and throwing tomatoes at her. It can be from the perspective of someone in the 1960 watching this on TV. You may even choose to pull a theme from this painting and write a story based on that theme and not necessarily this story. Be creative. Get inspired. Please be sensitive and avoid using derogatory language.

**Step 1:**

Get into pairs and share what you were able to finish so far. Is there anyone who would like to share? If there is more than one character, you may do a dramatic reading which means characters are assigned and the play is read with emotion but not necessarily acted out. This is what we will do with our final scripts as well.

**Step 2:**

After students share, have a class discussion.

What made these stories meaningful? Is this an issue that our country still faces? Why might it be valuable to read and watch plays about these themes or issues?

This is one way to get ideas for your plays. Choose an important issue that our community has dealt with or is still dealing with and tell a story about it! This is one way we can make meaningful art.

Today we are going to do a few different activities to help us come up with ideas for our final scripts. Please be paying attention to things you like or don’t like and ideas that come to your mind.

**Step 3:**

Everyone sit in a circle with a piece of paper and something to write with. Don’t write your name on the paper. Don’t think too hard about this. Take thirty seconds for each step.

Write a main idea or theme at the top of the paper. Fold the part of the paper that has been written on over so that the theme cannot be seen. Pass the paper to your left.

Write a profession on the paper. Fold it again so what you wrote can’t be seen. Pass the paper to your left.

Write a Place. Fold the paper, pass to your left.

Write two nouns. Any nouns. It can be a food, an article of clothing, a person, an animal, etc.

Fold the paper. Pass to your left.

Who can tell me what a plot summary is? Now unfold the paper in your hands. You now need to spend the next 3 minutes writing the plot summary of a story including these elements. Think of how the different things written on your paper can come together into an interesting story that focuses on the main idea or theme written at the top. Have fun. There aren’t any rules to how you do this. Just DO IT.

**Step 4:**

This is just another way to brainstorm ideas. Keep trying new things until you figure out what story you want or need to tell. I encourage you, whatever you do, to make it meaningful. Make it something you are proud to put your name on because you are talking about something important or significant to you.

**Assign Homework**: Come to class with the plot summaries of at least 2 different story ideas that you might use for your final scripts.

**Step 5:**

Until the end of class, have students do this brainstorming activity:

Write a list of everything you remember from your life from beginning to end. The day you lost your toy at the beach when you were 2. The day your first grade teacher wouldn’t let you go to the bathroom and you peed your pants in class. The day you lost your first tooth.

Choose one of those events to write a story about. It is helpful if this event is meaningful to you. It might be because it reminds you of good memories or people you love. It might be because you learned something important that day. But figure out why these memories stand out to you and use that to inspire your stories! It doesn’t have to be about YOU but you can draw inspiration from this real life event and maybe place other characters in a similar situation or use that story in the plot of the larger story you tell.

**Lesson 4: Plot and Dialogue**

**Lesson Objective**: Students will demonstrate their ability to revise their own work by writing and revising part of their ten minute scenes in class.

**Standards:**

TH:Cr3.1.8 - Use repetition and analysis in order to revise devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

**Hook:**

Have students sit in a circle. One person will start with a sentence about anything and the class must continue telling the story. Go around the circle and let each student continue the story, contributing only one sentence to the story each. Instruct students beforehand to be aware of where they are in the story (if they’re in the middle, they might want to begin resolving conflicts and working toward a climax. if they are close to the end, they will need to begin wrapping the story up).

**Step 1:**

After the students tell their story, have them remain in a circle and have a brief class discussion.

Was it frustrating to not be able to take the story where you wanted it to go? To say what you wanted to say? Did you feel limited being able to only say one sentence or to only be able to do one thing like conclude the story? Those of you in particular points like the middle and the end had a little more pressure on you to find the high and low points of the story. What did you change about your sentence as the story evolved and then finally got to you? Why did you have to change your idea? (because of time constraints, because of the requirement to wrap up the story, etc.)

As we write any play, but particularly a ten minute play, we need to be aware of our restrictions. Time is a restriction. Our play can’t be five hours long. The medium of theatre is a restriction. As we discussed a few lessons ago when we talked about the difference between a short story and a play, we cannot describe everything in great detail or narrate what characters are feeling. We have to SHOW our audience where we are and actors need to SHOW the audience what characters are feeling. We have to limit how much we change scenes or do montages like you see a lot in movies.

**Step 2:**

Have students get into groups of 3 and share a brief summary of their 2-3 story ideas. They will get feedback based on their peers based on the following questions.

Does the story have each of the plot elements?

Can the story be told in ten minutes? What can be added or cut to fit the criteria?

Does it have a strong start?

Do the character actions and relationships interest you? Does the audience care about them?

Does the audience remain interested throughout?

Does it have a strong ending?

**Step 3:**

Have students make revisions to their plot summaries/story ideas individually. After 3-4 minutes, instruct students to begin writing their ten minute plays on their own. Have them pick one of the story ideas they came up with and just start writing everything that comes to mind. Go around and help students as necessary, guiding them to make bold choices and helping them feel confident in an idea or to revise their ideas.

**Step 4:**

After about 10-15 minutes of writing, have students say their written lines of dialogue out loud. Ask them to think about how the line sounds, if it feels true to life hearing it out loud. AFter about two minutes, ask students to make necessary revisions and then get with a partner.

**Step 5:**

Have partners swap scripts and read lines of dialogue from their partner’s script aloud. They will give feedback to their peers on how easy the lines are to say aloud, how they sound, if they feel true to life.

**Step 6:**

For the remainder of class, have students continue working on their scripts individually. They are expected to bring copies of their plot diagrams to class NEXT TIME as well as whatever they have completed of their script. It needs to be at least a page.

**Lesson 5: Characters and Relationships**

**Lesson Objective:** Students will demonstrate their ability to establish relationships in dialogue by revising their scripts in class.

**Standards:**

TH:Cr3.1.I - Practice and revise a devised or scripted drama/theatre work using theatrical staging conventions.

**Hook:**

This is played like a Blind Date show. One player leaves the room while three others go “onstage” or to the front of the class. While the fourth player is out of the room, the rest of the class comes up with strong personality traits, or even specific famous characters that the other 3 players will adopt. Examples might be No. 1 is a robot, No. 2 is Jack Sparrow and No. 3 thinks she’s in a live game of Monopoly. The fourth player comes back in the room and is allowed to ask three questions to each of the contestants. This is best when a question is asked to one contestant, then the other, then the other and then the second question is asked to each, etc. After the questions player 4 should guess what the personality traits/characters were.

**Step 1:**

*Discuss:*

How were characters or character traits revealed? Did characters announce everything about themselves right at the beginning? Why or why not?

(Because it’s more interesting and it’s more true to life. Because it’s more logical.) Encourage students to refer back to their handout with the four script writing tips on it. Write those four terms on the board so students have a visual.

**Step 2:**

Let’s talk about how our dialogue can establish relationships by writing some examples.

In your self-start notebooks, start writing dialogue between Bob and Sarah. You must write 16 lines of dialogue - 8 lines each. In this scene, Bob and Sarah have had some sort of connection in the past but now they are ending that connection. So you decide what their relationship is and how you’re going to show that relationship. You have two minutes. Just write!

**Step 3:**

Have one student share by casting their Bob and their Sarah. Ask another student to share whose relationships were totally different than that example. What changed in their dialogue? How did we know what the relationships were?

**Step 4:**

Have students write the scene again. Same situation, same people. You can change small details if you like. Now you can only use 10 words of dialogue. You might need to write stage directions for your actors.

**Step 5:**

First have one of the original Bob and Sarah scenes share with the same actor and actress. Ask, “If we hadn’t known the story from before, would we understand what was going on?” (probably not). So what could we have Bob and Sarah DO but not necessarily SAY to establish their relationship and the expository information we need to understand the scene? Students will suggest different movements, perhaps showing Bob and Sarah holding hands and then having Sarah pull her hand away, etc. Ask the students to re-perform the scene.

**Step 6:**

Ask: Which version of the scene was more powerful to you? There is no right answer. How would we write those actions for the second version we just saw into the script?

Demonstrate this by writing the stage directions on the board for that scene as a student dictates them.

**Step 7:**

Have a new student (who did not share their original Bob and Sarah scene) share, casting their own Sarah and Bob. Before they perform, ask the writer and actors to confer and decide what actions they can add to the scene to help us understand.

Turn to a partner and talk about what made these two versions of the scene (16 lines and 10 words) so different. Were there moments that were more powerful for you in either one of them?

**Step 8:**

Have students remain in those partnerships and get out their scripts they have been working on. Have each partner share about a page of their script with the other. Go through this same process. Try to rewrite a scene together using half the dialogue, deciding what can be cut and where stage directions may need to be added.

**Step 9:**

Remind students that the rough drafts of their scripts are due NEXT TIME. Go over what a rough draft means. For the purposes of this class, a rough draft should be your best work. It is printed, completed, follows all the criteria on the assignment sheet. The only reason we are calling it a rough draft is because they will be required to make revisions based on teacher feedback within a week of receiving that feedback.

**Lesson 6: Dramatic Readings**

**Lesson Objective:** Students will be able to discern what works and does not work in a dramatic piece by reading and evaluating their own scripts and those of their peers during dramatic readings.

**Standards:**

TH:Re8.1.8c - Apply personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs to evaluate a drama/theatre work.

**Materials Needed:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VUV2Yl8gsI> from 2:30 to the end.

Mindy Kaling’s “Why Not Me?” Excerpt

**Hook:**

Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VUV2Yl8gsI> from 2:30 to the end.

Why did I have you write scripts? What’s the point?

Remember that you have a voice and what you have to say is powerful and important. Be respectful of everyone’s individual voice as we read scripts today. If you’re not proud of what you turned in today, revise it. Change it. Turn it in again and show me what you really have to say.

**Step 1:**

Have students sit in a circle. We will only get through about 5 scripts today. Please, if you are excited to share your script, be patient, and know that we will be working with your scripts in the future so hold on to them when I pass them back.

**Step 2:**

Briefly explain that we are doing a dramatic reading. Writers may assign characters to read parts and readers can use emotion and vocal variation. But they do not need to act out elaborate scenes or get up. Writers should also assign someone to read stage directions if they are important or lengthy.

**Step 3:**

After all the dramatic readings, have students reflect on at least two scripts they heard today. Have them write about what they liked and what they did not like and WHY. What about their beliefs or personal preferences have they learned?

**Step 4:**

Have students gather in a semi-circle around you. Ask them to turn to a peer and take 30 seconds to talk about what they think it means to be confident. Have a few students share by raise of hand.

**Step 5:**

Read the excerpt from Why Not Me on Confidence.

**Step 6:**

What does Mindy Kaling say confidence is? How do we develop it? (Through hard work. We EARN what we receive, we believe we have done our best work, etc.)

Remind students that as we continue into the next unit in which they will be directing, rehearsing, and performing the scripts they have written, that revisions are REQUIRED and due one week from the day they receive feedback on their rough draft.

Why do you think I am requiring you to make revisions? How does this assignment relate to what we just read?

Finish class by saying something like this to students:

Everything we do in this class is for a purpose. I have asked you to write these scripts because you have a voice. I have asked you to revise your scripts because I want you to learn how to develop true and lasting confidence by working hard and creating and turning in things that you are proud of. I don’t want to just give you a trophy (or an A) for wearing cool clothes or turning in sloppy work. I want you to win trophies because what you have done is truly great, and because I see you making progress as creators.

**Excerpt from Why Not Me by Mindy Kaling:**

Confidence is just entitlement. Entitlement has gotten a bad rap because it's used almost exclusively for the useless children of the rich, reality TV stars, and Conrad Hilton Jr., who gets kicked off an airplane for smoking in the lavatory and calling people peasants or whatever. But entitlement in and of itself isn't so bad. Entitlement is simply the belief that you deserve something. Which is great. The hard part is, you'd better make *sure* you deserve it. So, how did I make sure that I deserved it?

To answer that, I would like to quote from the Twitter bio of one of my favorite people, Kevin Hart. It reads:

My name is Kevin Hart and I WORK HARD!!! That pretty much sums me up!!! Everybody Wants To Be Famous But Nobody Wants To Do The Work!

People talk about confidence without ever bringing up hard work. That's a mistake. I work a lot. Like, *a lot* a lot. I feel like I must have been watching TV as a kid and that cartoon parable about the industrious ants and the lazy grasshopper came on at a vital moment when my soft little brain was hardening, and the moral of it was imprinted on me. The result of which is that I'm usually hyper-prepared for whatever I set my mind to do, which makes me feel deserving of attention and professional success, when that's what I'm seeking.

I didn't always feel this way. When I was a kid, I thought I could cruise through life and get ahead on charm, like a little Indian Ferris Bueller. In the summer after fourth grade, my parents enrolled me in a two-week-long basketball camp. If it surprises you that a girl with my build was interested in basketball, it should. But I was, because I had a fantasy that I was in *Hang Time*. And I was terrible. I could've gotten better, but I didn't want to do drills. I just wanted to play pickup games, socialize, and drink Gatorade. I never wanted to practice. At the end of the two-week camp, I was no better at basketball. But at the farewell ceremony, trophies were handed out and I got one for "Coolest Clothes." I ran home, delighted, and placed it proudly on top of our TV for all to see.

Weeks later, I went to the TV room to find that it was gone. My beautiful trophy! Was it stolen by a gang of criminals jealous of my peach denim shorts from the Limited Too?! Mom told me she had "put it away." I didn't understand. Someone had singled me out for praise and the trophy deserved to be seen. Then my mom said something to me, slowly and carefully, like she always did to make sure I was really listening: "They gave you that trophy so you wouldn't feel bad, not because you deserved it. You should know the difference."

I was of course incredibly hurt and thought Mom was nuts. I thought, There's a great deal of value in being well dressed at basketball day camp. It keeps morale up and adds a sense of cheeky fun to the whole day. Later, I realized what she had said was true. A bunch of unearned trophies around the house would make me hooked on awards, which is bad in general, but especially bad if you don't deserve them. The whole experience made me want to win another trophy, but win it for actually doing something great.