

This article appeared in the August, 2010 members-only newsletter for the New York State Theater Education Association.

Building Bridges: The Playwright's Perspective

By Elana Gartner

I have had a wonderful recent experience with a freshman at a college in South Carolina who was using a monologue of mine for a freshman showcase. Her professor was excellent about obtaining permission from me and the student followed up afterwards with a touching note about how performing the monologue had helped her heal from a personal tragedy. I have also had other students and parents contact me because they have found a deep connection to the characters that I've written. These kinds of correspondences make the every day difficulties of being a playwright worth it.

The next generation is an important consideration for any emerging playwright. The current students are the next actors, playwrights, technicians, directors, producers and audience members. It is, therefore, imperative for those who are theater students to know about the work of contemporary playwrights, in addition to those who are well-sung. Among other things, contemporary playwrights are likely to be addressing issues that are relevant, set in cultures that the students can more easily identify with, and using more familiar linguistics. Experiencing these scripts will also teach students about the current trends in the theater industry that they may be entering.

Many playwrights have started providing 2-3 person scenes on their personal websites, targeted specifically at theater educators. Some require payment for the full script (most are nominal fees), some are free for download. Here are some that I have collected from fellow playwrights, in addition to my own:

- Bobbi Chukran- www.bobbichukran.com/theater-education.html
Excerpted dialogue (comedy)
- Elana Gartner- www.elanagartner.com/store/education.html
Excerpted monologues and dialogues (drama)
- Alex Broun- www.alexbroun.com
Ten-minute plays (all genres)
- Geralyn Horton- www.stagepage.info
Excerpted monologues and one-acts (drama and comedy)

Of course, there are also many compilations of 2-3 person scenes and monologues made available through Smith-Krause, Merriweather, Pioneer, Baker's, Heinemann and Samuel French. Playwright Maureen Brady Smith sent me the link to her own blog where there are links to some of these publishers' websites: www.myfirstactingseries.blogspot.com

Many young actors have contacted me through the Monologue Database www.notmyshoes.net/monologues, where I have several monologues listed. This database has downloadable monologues from contemporary playwrights. In addition to

using these monologues for classroom work, they are also often used for auditions. Again, some full scripts are free and some are not.

You or your students can always contact a playwright directly to ask to have a fee waived in the interest of theater education. Many playwrights will consent to this request. However, bear in mind that playwrights are independent artists and may also have budgetary constraints.

As always, the rights for any script remain with the playwright and they must be contacted for permission for a full production in front of an audience. If you have legal questions regarding the production of a play, you can contact the Dramatists Guild at 212-398-9366.

Should you have budding young playwrights in your classroom, I would encourage you to have them contact professional playwrights for insight on their work. Any kind of mentoring conversation or formal mentorship can inspire the kind of confidence needed to pursue the craft. And, again, most playwrights would be happy to have conversations with students.

There are also many opportunities for young playwrights to submit work to festivals, conferences, contests and theaters. Dramatists Guild has information on many of them. However, another excellent resource for young playwrights is www.emergingplaywrights.com which has updated listings for opportunities in the field.

And, finally, nothing can replace the experience of working in a professional theater. I spent one summer working at Williamstown Theatre Festival, another at Connecticut Repertory Theater and a summer as an intern at Cherry Lane Theater, Second Stage and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Theaters and festivals are always looking for interns, apprentices, and technical assistants. These opportunities can be found in many places. Among them are:

- Playbill- www.playbill.com
- The New York Foundation for the Arts- www.nyfa.org
- Action Without Borders-www.idealists.org

Thank you for working so hard to bring real theater experiences to the next generation. See you at the theater!

Elana Gartner is a Brooklyn playwright. Her plays have been produced in a number of theaters on the East Coast. She runs a playwriting group in New York City called EMG Playwriting Workshop. She has taught playwriting workshops for mentoring organization, Girls Write Now, and at NYSTEA's Drama Power!. She is a member of Dramatists Guild. www.elanagartner.com